

Ideas on Language in Early Latin Christianity

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Ideas on Language in Early Latin Christianity

From Tertullian to Isidore of Seville

By

Tim Denecker



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This book is printed on acid-free paper and produced in a sustainable manner.

To the memory of my grandfathers

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Preface

The ‘Latin West’ of late antiquity and the early Middle Ages witnessed a variety of sociocultural changes, which exerted a considerable impact on linguistic situations and the ways in which these were perceived. Early Latin Christianity—here defined as stretching from Tertullian (b. c.160) to Isidore of Seville (d. 636)—thus constitutes a fascinating period in the history of Western linguistic thought. In spite of this, a comprehensive and systematic investigation of the linguistic ideas held by early Christian Latin authors has long remained a desideratum. The present study, which aims to fill this gap in the literature, originated as a doctoral thesis, defended at KU Leuven in September 2015. I am grateful to the university’s Research Council for financing the project in the framework of which I could conduct my research (2011–2015), as well as for granting a subsequent one-year postdoctoral fellowship (2015–2016). I am also much indebted to the Research Foundation—Flanders (FWO), for funding three more years of postdoctoral research (2016–2019), and for supporting stays in Durham, Berlin and Paris.

This study could not have been brought to completion without the invaluable guidance of Pierre Swiggers, Gert Partoens, Toon Van Hal and Thorsten Fögen. All four of them formulated critical and stimulating comments on preliminary versions, and in this way contributed highly to the quality of this study. Of course, all remaining errors or weaknesses are entirely my own responsibility. I also want to acknowledge the encouragement and advice I could receive over the past years from Louis Holtz, Lambert Isebaert, Mark Janse, Mathieu Lamberigts, Bruno Rochette, and Dirk Sacré. Furthermore, I want to thank the Editors of *Vigiliae Christianae Supplements* and an anonymous referee for their valuable remarks and for accepting my work for publication in this prestigious series.

The quality of this study has profited greatly from the support provided by staff members and colleagues in Leuven and abroad. Those of them who have grown from colleagues into friends will, I trust, be well aware of this. My warmest thanks also go to my other friends, in Leuven, Poperinge and elsewhere, who have made sure that linguistic ideas did not become the only thing on my mind. Lastly, and most importantly, I want to thank my family, in particular my dearest Lore, my parents, and my sisters, on all of whom I know I can always count. I dedicate this volume to the memory of my grandfathers, Paul Denecker and Albert Herpelinck, who sparked my fascination for texts and stories from the past.

Paris, 31 March 2017

Acknowledgments

In a revised and rearranged form, this study integrates material previously published in Denecker (2014a, 2014b, 2015a, 2015b, forthc.c, forthc.d, forthc.e), in Denecker & Partoens (2014), and in Denecker *et al.* (2012). I have quoted or relied upon English translations of works by early Christian Latin authors whenever they were available. For the sake of convenience, I have listed the translations used (along with the editions used) in a single concordance under ‘Bibliography’ (p. 397). When no translation is mentioned for a particular work, this means that the translation provided is mine. Likewise, considering that most primary source passages can now easily be located using online databases, I have limited myself—with a few exceptions—to indicating book, chapter and paragraph number (when applicable), preferring not to burden the text or the footnotes with page references to the editions.

Abbreviations

Biblical Abbreviations Used

Gen.	Genesis	Hab.	Habacuc
Ex.	Exodus	Soph.	Sophonias
Num.	Numeri	Agg.	Aggaeus
Deut.	Deuteronomium	Zach.	Zacharias
Iud.	Iudicum	Mal.	Malachias
1 Par.	1 Paralipomenon	Matth.	Matthaeus
Tob.	Tobias	Marc.	Marcus
Iudith	Iudith	Luc.	Lucas
Iob	Iob	Ioh.	Iohannes
Ps.	Psalmi	Act.	Actus Apostolorum
Cant.	Canticum Canticorum	Rom.	Ad Romanos
Is.	Isaias	1 Cor.	1 ad Corinthios
Ier.	Ieremias	II Cor.	II ad Corinthios
Ez.	Ezechiel	Gal.	Ad Galatas
Dan.	Daniel	Eph.	Ad Ephesios
Os.	Osee	Phil.	Ad Philippenses
Ioel	Ioel	Tit.	Ad Titum
Am.	Amos	Iac.	Epistula Iacobi
Abd.	Abdias	1 Petr.	1 Petri
Ion.	Ionas	Apoc.	Apocalypse
Mich.	Michaeas		

Bibliographical Abbreviations Used

ABD	<i>The Anchor Bible Dictionary</i>
ACW	Ancient Christian Writers
AL	<i>Augustinus-Lexikon</i>
ASE	<i>Annali di storia dell'esegesi</i>
Aug	<i>Augustinianum</i>
AugStud	<i>Augustinian Studies</i>
BA	Bibliothèque augustinienne
BGS	<i>Beiträge zur Geschichte der Sprachwissenschaft</i>
CCSL	Corpus Christianorum, Series Latina
CJ	<i>The Classical Journal</i>

<i>CPG</i>	<i>Clavis Patrum Graecorum</i>
<i>CPL</i>	<i>Clavis Patrum Latinorum</i>
<i>CQ</i>	<i>Classical Quarterly</i>
<i>CSEL</i>	<i>Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum</i>
<i>DCH</i>	<i>The Dictionary of Classical Hebrew</i>
<i>DDD</i>	<i>Dictionary of Deities and Demons in the Bible</i>
<i>GCS</i>	Die Griechischen Christlichen Schriftsteller der ersten (drei) Jahrhunderte (<i>Corpus Berolinense</i>)
<i>GNO</i>	<i>Gregorii Nysseni Opera</i> (W. Jaeger)
<i>GRF</i>	<i>Grammaticae Romanae Fragmenta</i> (G. Funaioli)
<i>HEL</i>	<i>Histoire, Épistémologie, Langage</i>
<i>HL</i>	<i>Historiographia Linguistica</i>
<i>JECS</i>	<i>Journal of Early Christian Studies</i>
<i>JRS</i>	<i>Journal of Roman Studies</i>
<i>JSS</i>	<i>Journal of Semitic Studies</i>
<i>JTS</i>	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
<i>KGL</i>	<i>Grammatici Latini</i> (H. Keil)
<i>L&H</i>	<i>Language & History</i>
<i>LAC</i>	<i>L'antiquité classique</i>
<i>LBL</i>	Les belles lettres
<i>LCL</i>	The Loeb Classical Library
<i>LEC</i>	<i>Les études classiques</i>
<i>MGH AA</i>	<i>Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Auctores Antiquissimi</i>
<i>MGH SRM</i>	<i>Monumenta Germaniae Historica, Scriptores Rerum Merovingicarum</i>
<i>MiAg</i>	<i>Miscellanea Agostiniana</i>
<i>NPNF</i>	Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers
<i>PG</i>	<i>Patrologia Graeca</i> (J.P. Migne)
<i>PL</i>	<i>Patrologia Latina</i> (J.P. Migne)
<i>PRE</i>	<i>Paulys Realencyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft</i>
<i>RAC</i>	<i>Reallexikon für Antike und Christentum</i>
<i>RBén</i>	<i>Revue Bénédictine</i>
<i>RBPh</i>	<i>Revue belge de philologie et d'histoire</i>
<i>REAug</i>	<i>Revue des études augustinianes / Revue d'études augustiniennes et patristiques</i>
<i>REL</i>	<i>Revue des études latines</i>
<i>RHE</i>	<i>Revue d'histoire ecclésiastique</i>
<i>RPh</i>	<i>Revue de philologie, de littérature et d'histoire anciennes</i>
<i>SC</i>	Sources chrétiennes
<i>SE</i>	<i>Sacris Erudiri</i>
<i>SP</i>	<i>Studia Patristica</i>

<i>StudMed</i>	<i>Studi medievali</i>
<i>TAPhA</i>	<i>Transactions of the American Philological Association</i>
<i>TPhS</i>	<i>Transactions of the Philological Society</i>
<i>VChr</i>	<i>Vigiliae Christianae</i>
<i>VetChr</i>	<i>Vetera Christianorum</i>
<i>wosa</i>	The Works of Saint Augustine: A translation for the 21st century
<i>ws</i>	<i>Wiener Studien</i>
<i>zac</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für Antikes Christentum / Journal of Ancient Christianity</i>

Introduction

This study aims to provide a history of the linguistic ideas held by early Christian Latin authors.¹ In doing so, it maintains a broad definition of the denomination ‘early Christian Latin authors’, covering works originally written in Latin by Christian authors, from the birth of Tertullian (c.160) until the death of Isidore of Seville (636), and including less prototypically ‘Christian’ authors such as, e.g., Ausonius and Boethius.² What this study does not aim to do, is to reconstruct the linguistic realities or situations on which the authors comment. Rather, its subject matter is situated on the level of ‘metalinguistic’ reflection, i.e. the observations formulated with regard to linguistic situations, structures, and issues. The study approaches these topics within three thematic areas, namely (1) language history, (2) language diversity, and (3) language description, as they are treated in these authors’ works, and as they relate to the pagan and to the Christian Greek tradition. Language-philosophical and semiotic issues, as well as matters of translation studies, are only discussed insofar as they relate to these three main themes.

It is important to stress from the beginning that early Christian Latin authors only rarely deal with linguistic issues for their own sake. In most cases, these issues are inserted in discussions that are actually concerned with theological, exegetical, or philosophical matters. Nevertheless, an investigation of early Christian Latin authors’ views on linguistic issues is very rewarding, not least due to the interaction between the ‘classical’ and ‘biblical’ frameworks within which they are working. In addition, it is during early Christianity that several linguistic notions developed that would persist well into the early modern period and sometimes even beyond. Two salient examples are the concept of a single ‘protolanguage’ and the notion of three ‘sacred languages’, but there are several other linguistic ideas which originated or were corroborated during early Latin Christianity, such as the ‘proper nature’ (*proprietas, idioma*) of a language—anticipating the notion of *génie de la langue* and Whorfian views on language—the close connection between *lingua* and *mores*, and the pessimistic conception of linguistic change as being linguistic corruption. These elements clearly demonstrate the relevance of early Latin Christianity within the history of linguistic ideas.

¹ For a brief outline of the research project within which this study was conceived, cf. Denecker *et al.* (2012). For a parallel study on early Christian Greek authors, cf. Van Rooy (2013).

² On the issue of Ausonius’ Christianity, cf. Green (1993) and Irmscher (1993); on Boethius’ Christian theological works, cf. Bradshaw (2009).

1 State of the Art

Extant studies on the linguistic ideas of early Christian Latin authors very often focus on the person of Augustine, who is indeed, in Burton's (2007: 9) words, 'the single most important exponent of Christian language theory in the West'. In particular, Augustine's theory of the sign—as developed mainly in *De magistro*, *De doctrina Christiana* and *De trinitate*—is an extremely well studied topic.³ Important work has also been done on Augustine's views on language in the *Confessiones* (Burton 2007; cf. Smolak 1994), and on his model of language history and its reception (Eskhult 2012, 2013, 2014). Augustine's biblical philology has been studied in great detail by Schirner (2015) (cf. my review, Denecker 2016), and standard works on Augustine commonly include chapters on 'Augustine and language' (e.g. Hübner 2004–2010a, Burton 2012).

The attention paid to early Latin Christianity in surveys on the history of linguistics varies considerably. Seuren (1998: xii)—who shows little interest in 'ancient linguistics' generally—bluntly denies that 'the Christian Bible played a significant part in the coming about of linguistics in the western world' and hardly deals with Christian writers of late antiquity. Similarly, early Christian Latin authors figure only very sporadically in the recent *Oxford Handbook of the History of Linguistics* (Allan 2013). Formigari (2004), to the contrary, duly acknowledges the importance of the Bible and the contributions made by early Christian authors. Indeed, she affirms (2004: 53) that 'the writings of the Greek and Latin Church Fathers, starting with Origen, were a true mine of metalinguistic observations'. Clackson (2015: 143–170) likewise devotes considerable attention to metalinguistic reflection among some authors of early Christianity. Various other handbooks in the history of linguistics devote an extensive section to linguistic ideas in early Latin Christianity, but most of them again exhibit a strong bias towards Augustine (Hovdhaugen 1982: 106–114; Edelstein 1985; Swiggers 1992; Orbán 2001; Law 2003: 94–101). Malmberg (1991: 97, 100–107) provides a more diversified survey by also paying attention to Jerome, Boethius and Isidore. Likewise, Stammerjohann's *Lexicon Grammaticorum* (2009) includes lemmata not only on Augustine (Simone), but also on Boethius (Magee), Cassiodorus (Petrilli), and Isidore of Seville (Poirel); conspicuous by its absence is a lemma on Jerome.⁴

³ Important studies on this subject are Markus (1957), Jackson (1969), Simone (1972), Ruef (1981), Ando (1994), Kirwan (1994), and Vecchio (1994). This is not an exhaustive list. For a brief survey on the topic, cf. Cameron (1999).

⁴ In Aronoff & Rees-Miller's comprehensive *The Handbook of Linguistics*, Campbell (2001: 84) devotes a paragraph to early Christian writers in his chapter on the history of linguistics.

Another group of relevant contributions limit themselves to a specific topic and/or to a single author. Cases in point are the numerous dense and detailed studies by Bartelink, e.g. on 'linguistic and stylistic observations in the works of Ambrose' (see Bibliography *sub* Bartelink), and Barr's article on Jerome's appreciation of Hebrew (1966). Hilhorst (2007) is an important study on the prestige of Hebrew in late antique and medieval Christianity, while Graves (2007a) extensively deals with Jerome's Hebrew philology. Müller in several articles (2004, 2005, 2006) investigates Isidore of Seville's periodization of the Latin language. Early Christian Latin authors' language-historical ideas are discussed in connection with the story of Babel by Borst (1958). Furthermore, their linguistic ideas are dealt with indirectly in Marti's (1974) book on translators from Augustine's days, and in Amsler's (1989) on etymology and grammatical discourse in late antiquity and the Middle Ages. Early Christian Latin authors are also included in Fögen's study of Latin authors' attitudes towards their mother tongue (2000: 221–227), and in Müller's of language awareness and linguistic variation in ancient Latin literature (2001). Ferri (2015) analyzes a number of observations on linguistic variation in (Greek and Latin) 'Patristic' Bible commentaries, expressly calling for further examination of these observations from a variationist perspective.

Lastly, several studies have broached the corpus of linguistic comments by early Christian Latin authors as a treasure trove for the reconstruction of contemporary linguistic reality. Relevant cases are Siegfried (1884), Sutcliffe (1948), and Barr (1967), who rely on Jerome's observations in order to reconstruct the pronunciation of Hebrew in his days. Other cases in point are Sofer's lexical investigations on Isidore's *Etymologiae* (1927, 1928), Löfstedt's discussion of Augustine as a witness of colloquial Latin (1975) (cf. also Bartelink 1982, Hübner 2004–2010b), Banniard's study of oral and written communication in Western late antiquity (1992a), and Adams' on bilingualism and the Latin language (2003), and on the regional diversification of Latin (2007). Although these studies differ fundamentally from mine in purpose and approach, they were very useful in establishing the linguistic situations on which early Christian Latin authors pass their metalinguistic comments.

This survey shows that extant scholarly literature on the linguistic ideas of early Christian Latin authors either clusters around Augustine and his theory of the sign, or in a rather selective way covers a number of isolated authors and topics. A comprehensive and systematic study of linguistic ideas in early Latin Christianity has hitherto been lacking. In addition, it seems to be a common assumption that early Christian linguistic thought is essentially monolithic and repetitive. This is shown by the focus on Augustine as (implicitly) representative of early Latin Christianity in the history of linguistics. In order to enhance

our understanding of linguistic ideas in early Latin Christianity, this study will examine the validity of this assumption (1) by thoroughly disclosing the corpus of primary sources, (2) by contextualizing it and investigating it in a systematic and comparative way, and (3) by paying attention to the dynamics of innovation versus canonization, in connection with the construction of intellectual authority.

2 Corpus, Method, and Structure

In my attempt to fulfill this purpose, I have proceeded as follows. The nucleus of the corpus of primary sources was established through an exploration of the *Index linguisticae* of the *Patrologia Latina* (221: 643–752).⁵ This initial corpus was further expanded (1) on the basis of references in secondary literature and cross-references in source texts, and (2) by means of targeted searches (truncated forms of *lingua*, *sermo*, *babel*, *latinus*, *graecus*, *hebraeus*, etc.) through Brepols' *Cross Database Searchtool*, which covers among other databases the *Library of Latin Texts* (*A* and *B*) and *Monumenta Germaniae Historica*. It should be emphasized that in principle, language manuals (grammatical, lexicographical, and orthographical works) composed by early Christian Latin authors have not been included in the corpus of primary sources, since these belong to a normative and prescriptive tradition in its own right, with very specific formal and conceptual characteristics. However, attention has been paid to the authors' reliance on (pagan and Christian) language manuals whenever relevant. In order to investigate the corpus resulting from the abovementioned searches in a systematic way, use was made of an 'analytical grid' organizing the respective sets of specific research questions, which are introduced and contextualized at the beginning of each chapter. The Table of Contents gives a good idea of what this analytical grid looked like (research questions in the rows, authors in the columns, values or answers indicated at the intersections).

What follows is a concise outline of the structure of this study. It may be good to point out already here that for reasons of space and relevance, some heterogeneous but potentially interesting topics relating more or less remotely to language have been left out of the study's primary focus. Such topics are lying,

⁵ This volume of the *Patrologia Latina* was published by Migne (1800–1875) in 1864. The wide scope of this previously hardly explored *index* becomes clear from its full title: *Index linguisticae, in quo notantur quaecumque tradidere patres de uariarum linguarum et idiomatum origine, ingenio, usu, etc. Vna simul dantur innovationes uerborumue corruptiones quae labentibus annis irrepserunt, etc.*

reading,⁶ silence (e.g. Dobbins 2001), body language and paralinguistic communication (Burton 2007: 133–172; Fögen 2001, 2009), restraint of the tongue (cf. e.g. Iac. 3:5–10), and animal communication (e.g. Fögen 2007). It should be noted, however, that some of these topics will inevitably come in obliquely.

As was already indicated, this study covers three thematic areas in the linguistic thought of early Christian Latin authors, namely (1) language history, (2) language diversity, and (3) language description. These three main themes correspond to the main groups in the analytical grid of research questions, and to the main parts of which this study consists. These main parts include ten chapters, which have been organized so that they follow logically upon each other. Within Part 1 of this study, Chapter 1 deals with the authors' discussions of the origin and nature of language, and Chapter 2 with their opinions regarding the 'primeval situation' in language history—i.e. the period prior to the events of Babel. Chapter 3 is concerned with the authors' conceptions of the origin of language diversity, in connection with the events of Babel. Within Part 2 of this study, Chapter 4 looks at the authors' appraisals and uses of linguistic diversity as a historical, 'post-Babelic' reality. Chapter 5 deals with their appraisals and uses of an individual's (alleged) multilingual competence, as a means of countering the undesirable reality of linguistic diversity. Chapter 6 is concerned with the authors' interpretations and uses of 'unnatural' forms of multilingual competence, most prominently the apostles' xenolalia at Pentecost. Part 3 deals with elements of linguistic description in the authors' works, with particular attention to contrastive observations. Within this part of the study, the focus gradually narrows from the 'language level' (Chapter 7), over the 'sentence level' (Chapter 8) and the 'word level' (Chapter 9), to the 'letter level' (Chapter 10).

The detailed research questions will be formulated at the beginning of each chapter. In the remainder of this introduction, I will frame my investigation of linguistic ideas in early Latin Christianity by paying attention to a number of 'contextual' factors.

3 The 'Classical' School Tradition and the Rise of Christianity

The rise of Christianity in the Latin West of late antiquity radically altered the sociocultural and intellectual climate of the classical world (cf. e.g. Daniélou 1978; Brown 1978, 1996). As is commonly known, this intellectual climate had

6 On this subject in general, and on Augustine's amazement at Ambrose's silent reading in particular, cf. Knox (1968), Flores (1975), Gilliard (1993), and Gavrilov (1997: 61–66).

been founded for ages on the Graeco-Roman grammatical and rhetorical tradition, which provided the basis for every form of advanced learning and more specialized disciplines, such as e.g. music, mathematics, geography, and philosophy.⁷ Prominent among these specialized disciplines were logic and dialectic as expounded by Aristotle and as commented upon in the Neoplatonist commentary tradition. This tradition was mediated to the Latin West most importantly by Cicero, Marius Victorinus and Boethius, and was crucial in shaping Christian thought in general (Berschin 1980: 60) and the ideas held by authors such as Ambrose and Augustine in particular (Hadot 1971: 201–210). The rise of Christianity introduced a set of foundational religious texts which together are known as the Bible, consisting of the Old Testament, originally written in Hebrew and Aramaic, and the New Testament, originally written in Greek (cf. e.g. Law 2003: 94–95; Burton 2007: 8). This corpus of biblical texts—which did not constitute a real unity until Cassiodorus (c.485–c.580[?]) (Gribomont 1985b: 148–149)—provided a novel intellectual ‘frame of reference’ which—as far as the subject matter of the present study is concerned—intensely interacted with the Graeco-Roman intellectual tradition in at least two significant ways (cf. Fontaine & Pietri 1985).

In one way, the rhetorico-grammatical and commentary tradition provided the terminological and conceptual tools by which to read and understand the biblical texts. These were the tools that had long been used in reading and explaining school texts such as, most importantly, Homer’s *Iliad* and *Odyssey* and Vergil’s *Aeneid* (cf. e.g. Fontaine 1959: 31–32; Tornau 2004–2010a: 1037). Partly due to the influence of Jewish and Hellenistic interpretive traditions, these tools in Greek and Latin Christian contexts developed into independent strategies of Christian exegesis (Pollmann 1996, 2009). De Lubac in his classic work on Christian exegesis (1959–1964) distinguishes four strategies or levels of biblical interpretation, namely the literal level, followed by typology, tropology, and anagogy. Generally speaking, typology (or allegory) means that an Old Testament passage or event prefigures a New Testament one; tropology that a moral significance is given to a certain passage or event; and anagogy that a biblical passage is interpreted with reference to the afterlife (cf. Colish 1997: 19). It will become clear throughout this study that discussions of linguistic issues, due to the exegetical context, are often considerably biased by these interpretive strategies.

⁷ On the subject of education in antiquity and its transformations in (Christian) late antiquity, cf. Roger (1968 [1905]), Marrou (4¹⁹⁵⁸, 7¹⁹⁶⁵), Riché (3¹⁹⁷²), Fuchs (1971), Bonner (1977), and Gemeinhardt (2007).

In another way, there existed serious discrepancies between the contents, values, and presuppositions of the pagan ‘classical tradition’—broadly defined—on the one hand, and the Bible or the biblical tradition on the other (Momigliano 1963; Formigari 2004: 37). The desirable relation between secular and sacred learning and the preferable attitude towards classical literature—including its pagan (polytheist) mythology and philosophy—have been a major issue in Christian thought from the very beginnings in early Greek Christianity until at least the works of Isidore of Seville (d. 636) (cf. e.g. Hagendahl 1958, 1967, 1983). Christian ways of coming to grips with this opposition cover a whole range of strategies, including the following: rejecting the classical tradition; tracing the roots of the classical tradition (as ‘plagiarism’) back to the biblical tradition; reinterpreting the contents of the classical tradition within a biblical framework (cf. the ‘spoils of the Egyptians’ in Ex. 12:35–36; Marrou ⁴1958: 393–394; Allen 2008); or smoothly juxtaposing valuable elements stemming from both traditions (cf. e.g. Fontaine 1959: 798; O’Donnell 1979: 158–159; Fredouille 1985: 37–38). This problematic relationship has provided the theme for several studies with telling titles such as *Saint Augustin et la fin de la culture antique* (Marrou ⁴1958), *Augustine: Ancient thought baptized* (Rist 1994), and *Interpretatio Christiana* (Inglebert 2001). The theme has also been dealt with by Roger (1968 [1905]: 131–143), Riché (³1972: 119–139), and Marrou (⁷1965: 451–484), the latter writing on the interaction between Christianity and classical education in terms of an ‘osmose culturelle’.⁸ More recently, the theme of the Christian *usus iustus* of the classical tradition has been treated extensively in the volumes authored and/or edited by Gnilka in the series *Χρῆσις: Die Methode der Kirchenväter im Umgang mit der antiken Kultur*.

Apart from the external conflict with paganism and the classical tradition, Christianity also had to deal with internal divisions, which (on a teleological reading) functioned as catalysts in the formation of orthodoxy and ‘the Church’.⁹ During its first centuries and afterwards, Christianity encountered opposition from various dissenting voices—generally denoted as ‘schismatics’ or as ‘heretics’ (although these terms cannot be used interchangeably)—and

⁸ With regard to early Christian Latin authors’ attitude towards the ‘classical tradition’, reference can also be made to the lemmata ‘Augustine’, ‘Fathers, Church’, ‘*Interpretatio Christiana*’, and ‘Isidore’ in Grafton, Most & Settis (2010).

⁹ Cf. e.g. Colish (1997: 7): ‘Their very effort to grapple with heresy and to explain why it constituted error led them to state the orthodox consensus position more clearly. In this sense, heresies are important historical markers telling us what the perceived problems in Christianity were at particular times and they also served as catalysts in the development of orthodox doctrine.’

was bound to engage in doctrinal (theological, christological, ecclesiological) debate during, e.g., the Origenist, Arian, Donatist, and (semi-)Pelagian controversies (Kelly 51977). This doctrinal context, too, has important bearings on early Christian approaches of linguistic topics, the more so since several controversies centered exactly on the preferable translation of certain crucial terms or phrases from Greek into Latin.

With specific reference to the subject matter of this study, there are two more ways in which the coming of Christianity and the introduction of the Bible shaped the intellectual framework of early Christian Latin authors.

First, the Bible had a strong impact on the way in which Christian intellectuals conceptualized language and language history. Biblical passages constituting authoritative landmarks in early Christian thought about language are: Gen. 1, where God creates the universe through speech; Gen. 2:19–20 and 23, where God prompts Adam to give names to the animals and to his wife; Gen. 11:1–9, which contains the Babel narrative; Ioh. 1:1–18, describing Christ as the Word which is with God; and Act. 2:1–13, which contains the Pentecost narrative.¹⁰ Furthermore, it is important to point out that the introduction of the Bible, its respective components being originally written in Hebrew, Aramaic, and Greek, significantly altered, and arguably also expanded the actual linguistic horizon of Western intellectuals; this point will be discussed extensively below.¹¹

A second and related consequence of the introduction of the Bible is the upsurge of translation activities carried out in Christian late antiquity (Marti 1974: 121). The practice of translating the Bible from Hebrew and Greek into Latin, and of translating theological and exegetical writings from Greek into Latin, made Western intellectuals better aware of the structural differences between Latin and other languages. More precisely, they became increasingly aware of the characteristics of different languages, and some of them expressed the idea that Latin was ‘poorer’ than the source languages (Sect. 7.4, p. 247f.). It is also important to draw attention to the variety of Bible versions circulating in the world of early Christianity. Generally speaking, Latin Christians of late

¹⁰ Burton (2007: 8) also mentions Jud. 12:1–6 with the *shibboleth* narrative, Dan. 1:4, 17 about the boys being told to learn ‘Chaldean’ language and literature, and 1 Cor. 12–14, on ‘speaking in tongues’. These passages appear to have been less influential in the text corpus covered and will be discussed when relevant.

¹¹ In extant scholarly literature, the attention paid to linguistic matters in the Bible is discussed e.g. by Albertz (1989), Schenk (1991), Harris & Taylor (1997: 36–46), Law (2003: 99–108), Trabant (2006: 15–24), Burton (2007: 8–9), Kessler-Mesguich (2009), and Thomas (2011: 24–29).

antiquity worked with divergent versions together known as the *Vetus Latina* or, more appropriately, *Veteres Latinae* (Old Latin versions), which go back to the Greek Septuagint and among which the so-called *Afra* and *Itala* versions are traditionally best known (Gribomont 1985a; Kedar 1990: 302–313). These versions were superseded only gradually by the *Vulgata*, which resulted from Jerome's translations of parts of the Old Testament from Hebrew and Aramaic, and from his revisions of parts of the New Testament on the basis of the Greek text (Bogaert 1988: 156–159; Kedar 1990: 313–334; Tkacz 1996; Schulz-Flügel 2002; Brown 2003). Several discussions involving linguistic issues actually revolved around the correctness or 'preferability' of differing Bible versions and the readings contained in them.

4 Global Linguistic Situation and Individual Linguistic Competences

The global linguistic situation of Western late antiquity has been the subject of several solid studies (cf. Bruns 2002b for a brief survey). Bardy (1948) is still a very useful discussion of the linguistic situation in the ancient Church. Courcelle (2nd1948) deals with the presence of Greek language and learning in the West, from Macrobius to Cassiodorus. Mohrmann (1957) offers a discussion of linguistic problems in the early Church, and McGuire (1959) focuses on the decline of Greek in the West from c.150 to c.580. Relevant information can also be found in Marrou's history of ancient education (7th1965), in Riché's monograph on education and culture in the West from the 6th to the 8th century (3rd1972), and in Banniard's work on the 'cultural genesis' of Europe (1989). From different perspectives, more recent contributions have been made by Banniard in his study of oral and written communication from the 4th to the 9th century (1992a), and by Adams in his monographs on bilingualism and the Latin language (2003), on the regional diversification of Latin (2007), and on social variation and the Latin language (2013).

In what follows, I will first try to offer a global outline of the changing linguistic situation of Western early Christianity. Subsequently, I will turn to the individual authors figuring in this study and try to establish their respective linguistic competences and 'linguistic horizon'. I will not attempt to settle the question of whether one can assume the existence of an early Christian Latin group language or *Sondersprache*.¹²

¹² Cf. most importantly Schrijnen (1932) and Mohrmann (1958–1977). On the history of the *École de Nîmes*, cf. Palmer (1974 [3rd1961]: 181–205), Burton (2008b), and Denecker (forthc.a).

Global Linguistic Situation

The classical world of the Latin West as we know it—that is, as it is documented in literary sources by members of the educated upper class—has always been essentially bilingual, Latin and Greek (Ch. 5, p. 150f.). Latin literature originates in the translation and transfer of Greek literary works, and the Greek language remains a crucial component in the culture of the Latin West, in particular as the high-prestige language of the educated elite. Although languages other than Latin and Greek certainly play their parts too, given the vast area covered by the Roman Empire (Adams 2003, 2007), these ‘barbarian’ languages hardly occupy a place of significance in the ‘linguistic horizon’ of intellectuals living in the Latin West (Rochette 1997b), and they are largely neglected by Roman administration (Marrou 1965: 375–376).

With the rise of Christianity, this situation changes. The linguistic horizon of Western intellectuals is extended most importantly with Hebrew and Aramaic, the languages in which the Old Testament was originally written. However, most Christian intellectuals merely know that these languages exist or have loose second-hand notions of them—an important exception being Jerome, who is very aware of this and actively styles himself a *uir trilinguis* (Rebenich 1993; cf. below, p. 13).¹³ In addition, some early Christian Latin authors seem to be forced to pay at least some attention to the indigenous languages or the local varieties of Latin used in the regions where they are active, notably in conjunction with preaching and the propagation of faith (Banniard 1992a).

On the basis of Bardy (1948), the changes in the global linguistic situation can be outlined as follows. In spite of the diversified linguistic situation in Christian late antiquity, Latin and Greek remain the two languages of prime importance. As was the case with the origins of Latin literature, Latin Christianity and its literature also originate in Greek Christianity and its literature (Mohrmann 1949). During the first two centuries of Christianity, the language used by Christian communities in the West is Greek. A Latin Christian literature in its own right starts to develop only in the time of Tertullian (*c.*160–220), who writes most of his works in Latin but some in Greek (Barnes 2¹⁹⁸⁵: 68–69, 253, 276–277), and who on many occasions harks back to Greek etymologies or to the morphology and/or semantics of a Greek word in order to make his doctrinal point. For some time, Latin and Greek continue to be used next to

¹³ Only Origen and Jerome are generally accredited with a good command of Hebrew; however, both authors’ competence in Hebrew has also been debated (cf. below for Jerome, p. 13). Furthermore, Dekkers (1953: 226–227) points out that one must allow for a ‘foule d’interprètes anonymes, qui n’ont jamais manqué en Orient’, who also knew Hebrew to varying degrees.

each other in the West, and during the 4th century, there is an intense interaction between West and East. The second half of the 4th century is a very prolific period for Western translators and adaptors—Hilary, Ambrose, Rufinus, Jerome, Eusebius of Vercelli, Evagrius of Antioch—, who make Greek theological and exegetic works available to the Latin West, most importantly those by Origen (Lafferty 2003). This upsurge in translation activity can be interpreted as an indication that the gap between both languages is widening (Marti 1974: 20; cf. Marti 2002).

The actual ‘break’ between the ‘Greek East’ and the ‘Latin West’ is probably to be situated around 400, when prominent Christian Latin authors are no longer able, or do no longer see the benefit of interacting with ‘colleagues’ from the ‘other half’ of Christianity. It is indeed possible to single out Augustine as the first Latin ‘Father’ who lacks an active command of Greek (but cf. below, p. 14) (Marrou ⁴1958: 43; Dekkers 1953: 216; Marti 1974: 20–25). Nevertheless, educated individuals continue to master Greek to varying degrees (Marrou ⁷1965: 379), and the cultivation of the Greek language and culture witnesses a number of revivals, e.g. in the circles around Claudianus Mamertus in 5th-century Gaul (Brittain 2001) and around Boethius in 6th-century Italy (Courcelle ²1948: 255; Riché ³1972: 83). It seems reasonable to assume with Marrou (⁷1965: 384) that it is in the conservative aristocratic families in the city of Rome that the study of Greek maintained itself best.

From the break around 400 onwards, Latin is the nearly exclusive language of Western Christianity until about the 9th century, when the first clear differences between the Romance varieties and Latin as a learned, literary and administrative language can be perceived (O’Donnell 1979: 3; Banniarid 1992a). It goes without saying, however, that the Latin language used during the period covered by this study cannot be considered a monolithic entity (cf. Coleman 1987). Just as any language, the Latin language used in late antiquity varied along the different axes of Coseriu’s diasystem, that is to say, diachronically (historically), diatopically (geographically), diaphasically (stylistically), and diastratically (socially) (cf. Willems 2003: 4, with further references). More in particular, it is often described as ‘late(r) Latin’ or sometimes as ‘Vulgar Latin’ (Löfstedt 1959, Wright 2002, Burton 2009, Adams 2013), which gradually further diversified along the different regions where it was used (Adams 2007), and it seems safe to state that it shows the traces of a Christian influence in several respects (Braun 1985, Fredouille 1996, Burton 2011).

The Individual Authors' Linguistic Horizon and Linguistic Competences

All the authors included in the corpus of primary sources evidently know Latin. However, there are of course significant differences between the authors' levels of mastery of the Latin language, and the stylistic registers they employ in their writings. It is for instance hard not to perceive the differences between the nearly Ciceronian prose of Jerome's letters (Conring 2001) and the rather 'awkward' Latinity of Gregory of Tours (Bonnet 1968 [1890]), or between the sentences reflecting 'spoken language' in Augustine's sermons to the people (Mohrmann 1932) and the affected periods in which Sidonius Apollinaris addresses his aristocratic peers (Zelzer 1994–1995). It goes without saying that these stylistic differences also occur within the oeuvre of one and the same author.

Various Christian Latin authors of late antiquity know or have notions of one or more languages in addition to Latin. Since a full investigation of the authors' actual linguistic competences falls outside the scope of this study, the present survey largely relies on extant scholarly literature, most importantly Courcelle (2¹⁹⁴⁸), Bardy (1948), Marrou (7¹⁹⁶⁵), and Berschin (1980). Among those authors who have been accredited with varying degrees of competence in Greek—which was still relatively common in the Latin West of late antiquity (cf. above, p. 11)—one can mention Tertullian, Lactantius, Hilary of Poitiers, Filastrius, Ambrose,¹⁴ Rufinus, Gaudentius, Paulinus of Nola, Chromatius of Aquileia, Ausonius,¹⁵ Sidonius Apollinaris,¹⁶ Claudianus Mamertus, Fulgentius the mythographer,¹⁷ Fulgentius of Ruspe, Gennadius of Marseille,

¹⁴ Ambrose's proficiency in Greek has been estimated relatively high. Bardy (1948: 208): 'Il a su pourtant beaucoup plus de grec que la plupart des Occidentaux de son temps, que saint Augustin en particulier'; Bartelink (1979b: 186): 'Ambrosius, der über bemerkenswerte Kenntnisse des Griechischen verfügte'; McLynn (1994: 57): 'Ambrose's credentials were based ultimately upon his knowledge of Greek', but with reference to the reservations made in older literature; cf. also Ramsey (1997: 18, 54–55, 67).

¹⁵ Bardy (1948: 181–182) notes that 'de tous les hellénistes gaulois, Ausone lui-même est assurément le plus remarquable'.

¹⁶ Cf. the comments made by Loyen (1943: 26–30, 86, 137).

¹⁷ Whitbread (1971: 3) credits Fulgentius with a 'reasonably accurate knowledge' of Greek, but Hays (2002: 26) points out the gratuitousness of the Greek quotations, 'valoriz[ing] familiarity with Greek without actually requiring real knowledge of it'.

Gregory the Great,¹⁸ Boethius,¹⁹ Cassiodorus,²⁰ Dionysius exiguus, and John Cassian. Among those authors, Hilary of Poitiers, Ambrose, Rufinus, Boethius, and Dionysius exiguus are known to have translated and/or adapted (parts of) Greek works into Latin.

The case of Jerome's multilingual competence is an exceptional one (cf. Kelly 1975: *passim*; Fürst 2002: 324). First of all, Jerome's works are written in an excellent, 'classical' Latin. Jerome was taught by the prominent grammarian Aelius Donatus (*fl.* 354–363) in Rome,²¹ where he was also trained in rhetoric by an unknown teacher. He had an active command of Greek, which he acquired in Antioch,²² and—this is my working hypothesis—an advanced passive knowledge of Hebrew.²³ It is his competence in these three languages which Jerome boasts of when styling himself a *uir trilinguis* (Rebenich 1993). At least until the high Middle Ages, virtually every Christian Latin author quoting some Hebrew in his writings was dependent on Jerome (Elliott 1880: 871–872; Thiel 1973). To Jerome's competence in Latin, Greek, and Hebrew, one can furthermore add a certain knowledge of Aramaic (Brown 1992: 82–86; Adams 2003: 268–269, 294), as well as notions of Syriac (Rebenich 1992: 93; King 2009; Millar 2010: 72–74), of Punic (Penna 1983, Cox 1988), of the 'Illyrian' language or variety of Latin

- ¹⁸ The extent of Gregory's competence in Greek has been a matter of debate. Riché (31972: 189) denies that Gregory had any knowledge of Greek, Bartelink (1984a, 1985) holds that Gregory had only a superficial school competence of it, and Petersen (1976, 1986, 1987) argues in favour of a profound knowledge (cf. Martyn 2004: 102). It may be safe to state with Markus (1997: 36) that the extent of Gregory's knowledge of Greek 'is unlikely to have been either negligible or sufficient for easy competence'. Borst (1958: 434) provides references to older literature on the issue.
- ¹⁹ Boethius must have had a near-native competence in Greek; cf. Marenbon, who states that Boethius 'was fluent in Greek' (2003: 3) and, more precisely, that he 'also learned Greek, probably from a native speaker as a second mother tongue' (2003: 11).
- ²⁰ According to O'Donnell (1979: *passim*), Cassiodorus' Greek must have been relatively poor; cf. Barnish (1992: 88 n. 5).
- ²¹ On the connection between Donatus and Jerome, cf. Lammert (1912), Brugnoli (1965), and Holtz (1981: 37–46).
- ²² On Jerome's competence in Greek, cf. Courcelle (21948: 37–115), Jay (1974), Kamesar (1993), and Hamblenne (1994).
- ²³ The degree and nature of Jerome's Hebrew competence have been a matter of debate, to the extent that some have denied Jerome any substantial knowledge of the language, while others have accredited him with advanced competences. For a number of valuable contributions to the debate, cf. Elliott (1880: 864–868), Bardy (1934), Marrou (41958: 27–46), Burstein (1971, 1975), Opelt (1988), Adkin (1995), Adams (2003: 273), Graves (2007a: 2–7), Hilhorst (2007: 800–801), Newman (2009), and Millar (2010).

used in his native region, the borderland of Dalmatia and Pannonia (Sect. 9.2, p. 309), and possibly of the language used in the surroundings of Trier (Krappe 1929; Sofer 1937; Meißner 2009–2010; Sect. 7.3, p. 238, and 9.1, p. 295).

Another peculiar case is that of Augustine. Having been a teacher of grammar and rhetoric, the bishop of Hippo had an excellent command of the Latin language. Scholarly consensus has it that Augustine's knowledge of Greek was only slight, although he might have improved his command of it towards the end of his life (Neuschäfer 2004–2010: 1010–1011).²⁴ Much attention has been paid to Augustine's knowledge of Punic, the language of the population of Northern Africa, where Augustine was born and spent most of his life (Jongeling 2004–2010).²⁵ Although Augustine had in fact only very limited notions of Punic, he could occasionally combine these with what he found in Jerome's works in order to make up for his lacking competence in Hebrew (Marrou 4¹⁹⁵⁸: 416; Dochhorn 2004–2010: 1013).

Some other authors have been credited with notions of languages different from Greek or the Old Testament languages. Gregory of Tours, who most probably did not know Greek (Courcelle 2¹⁹⁴⁸: 249–250; Riché 3¹⁹⁷²: 250), may have had notions of an indigenous ('Gaulish' or 'Franconian') language (Riché 3¹⁹⁷²: 265). Fulgentius the mythographer in § 3 of the preface to his *De aetatibus mundi et hominis* refers to 'Libyan' as 'our own language' (cf. Hays 2004: 102; but cf. Sect. 10.3, p. 376). Cassiodorus may have known some Ostrogothic, although this remains doubtful (Barnish 1992: 88 n. 5). Given the scattered nature of the authors' relevant statements, and given the fact that they often base their comments on others' writings rather than on their own observations, it remains hard in most cases to determine the precise degree and nature of the authors' linguistic competences.

²⁴ In addition to Neuschäfer (2004–2010), cf. Rottmanner (1895), Salaville (1922), Guilloux (1925), Vega (1928), Courcelle (2¹⁹⁴⁸: 137–194), Bardy (1948: 196–202), Marrou (4¹⁹⁵⁸: 27–46), Finale Montalbano (1951), Villa (1952), Marti (1974: 20–25), Bonner (2¹⁹⁸⁶: 394–395), Bartelink (1987), O'Donnell (1992: 75), Lamberigts (1994), Markus (1999b: 502), Adams (2003: 220 n. 435), Hübner (2004–2010a: 993), and Schirmer (2015: 600–605). Cf. also the series of relevant contributions by Altaner, collected in Altaner & Glockmann (1967), on Augustine's acquaintance with and use of Philo of Alexandria, Irenaeus, Julius Africanus, Origen, Eusebius of Caesarea, Athanasius, Basil of Caesarea, Gregory of Nazianzus, Gregory of Nyssa, Epiphanius of Salamis, Didymus of Alexandria, and John Chrysostom.

²⁵ In addition to Jongeling (2004–2010), cf. Frend (1942), Courtois (1950), Green (1951), Lecerf (1955), Vattioni (1968, 1976), Penna (1983), Cox (1988), Adams (2003: 237–238), Lengrand (2005), and Lepelley (2005a, 2005b).

5 Intellectual Networks—‘Central’ and ‘Peripheral’ Authors—Life Dates

When investigating the linguistic ideas of early Christian Latin authors, it is important to bear in mind that these authors did not live and work in isolation, but instead were connected to each other in intellectual networks—or, alternatively, in ‘textual communities’ (Haines-Eitzen 2009)—which are often well traceable through letter exchange and dedications. In order to illustrate this point and to frame some of the ‘central’ authors figuring in this study (cf. below, p. 18), I will here discuss three representative cases of intellectual networks, each of a different type. As more isolated cases, one can mention the epistolary correspondence between Novatian, active in Rome, and Cyprian, who lived in Carthage (Hoffmann 2002: 169–170; Vogt 2002), next to the fact that Lactantius was taught by Arnobius the Elder (Barnes 21985: 9).

The first and most intricate network is ‘personal’ in nature and has Jerome as its (initial) focal point.²⁶ It is situated in late-4th and early-5th-century Italy, but stretches geographically into Palestine and Northern Africa. Jerome is known to have studied and worked in Rome, but later to have moved to Bethlehem, where he founded a monastery. Rufinus, one of the closest friends from his youth, not only became Jerome’s near neighbour in Bethlehem, but also his fiercest opponent during the Origenist controversy (Clark 1992, 1999). The quarrel is neatly documented in polemical writings from both sides (Lardet 1993). While Jerome is famous for his translations from Hebrew and Greek into Latin (Bardy 1948: 258–273), he was assisted in his monastery by a certain Sophronius, who turned several of Jerome’s translations and writings from Latin into Greek.²⁷ Rufinus, too, was a translator of exegetical works,²⁸ and both Jerome and Rufinus dedicated some of their translations to Chromatius,

²⁶ Cf. Bardy (1948: 214, 233), Rebenich (1992), and the useful *Prosopographia Hieronymiana* in Fürst (2003: 150–220). One of the foundations for Jerome’s prolific career consisted in his affinities with various Roman patrons, such as Pammachius, Pope Damasus I, and several aristocratic Christian women (on the latter ‘micro-network’, cf. Sect. 5.7, p. 189f.). They offered Jerome financial support and took care of the circulation of his works (Fürst 2002: 324).

²⁷ On Sophronius, cf. Courcelle (21948: 110), Bardy (1948: 141–142), Dekkers (1953: 204–205), and Rochette (1997a: 252).

²⁸ On Rufinus and his translation activities, cf. Murphy (1945), Wagner (1945), Bardy (1948: 273–280), Buchheit (1966), Winkelmann (1970), and Marti (1974: *passim*). As Dekkers (1953: 227) points out, Rufinus might also have translated Latin works into Greek. However, the source for this detail is Jerome’s *Liber tertius aduersus libros Rufini*, which due to the polemical context should be interpreted with caution.

a friend and correspondent of Ambrose (cf. below) and the bishop of Aquileia, who also knew Greek (Bardy 1948: 220).

Furthermore, Jerome is known to have polemicized—among other things on the status of the *Veteres Latinae*—with the anonymous Roman exegete dubbed ‘Ambrosiaster’ (Lunn-Rockliffe 2007, Hunter 1999, 2009; cf. below, p. 22), who was probably a competitor for the favour of Pope Damasus I.²⁹ Another opponent of Jerome, Ambrose,³⁰ the bishop of Milan, is known to have baptized Augustine and to have deeply influenced him both spiritually and intellectually.³¹ Ambrose also introduced Augustine to Filastrius, the bishop of Brescia whose catalogue of heresies Augustine would consult when composing his own *De haeresibus* (Bardy 1930: 404–407; Di Berardino 1999: 368–369; Di Berardino & O’Daly 2004–2010), and who would be succeeded by Gaudentius, the dedicatee of Rufinus’ translation of the pseudo-Clementine *Recognitiones* (Bardy 1948: 172; Dümler 2002b). Ambrose’s *Vita* was composed by his short-hand writer and secretary Paulinus the Deacon, on Augustine’s request (Van Uytfanghe 1985: 593; Ramsey 1997: 195–196). Augustine, in turn, got in touch with Jerome in order to consult him on matters of textual criticism, but the two of them became embroiled in an epistolary quarrel over the value of Jerome’s Bible translation as opposed to the *Veteres Latinae*.³² After Augustine’s death, the bishop’s life and works were recorded by his pupil and friend Possidius (Vessey 1999b, Dolbeau 2004–2010, Hermanowicz 2008), respectively in the *Vita* and the *Indiculus*, whereas many of Augustine’s ideas were integrated in the works of Quodvultdeus, another pupil and friend of his (McHugh 1999c).

A second instance of an intellectual network could be termed ‘organizational’ or ‘administrative’ and is situated in 5th and 6th-century Gaul. Consisting of members of the Catholic episcopal aristocracy, it includes the follow-

²⁹ On the connection between Jerome and Ambrosiaster, cf. Vogels (1956) and Cain (2005; 2009: 53–62).

³⁰ On the connection between Jerome and Ambrose, cf. Paredi (1964), Adkin (1993b), and McLynn (1994: 289).

³¹ On the connection between Ambrose and Augustine, cf. Marrou (1958: 421), Bonner (1986: 71–73; 1986–1994: 526–528, 533), Brown (2000: 69–78), Dassmann (1986), Ramsey (1997: 37, 49), and McLynn (1999). Ambrose’s successor Simplician, too, played a role in the conversion of Augustine, as well as in that of Marius Victorinus (Fitzgerald 1999b: 799).

³² On this epistolary quarrel, cf. de Bruyne (1932), Jouassard (1956), Hennings (1994), and Fürst (1994a, 1994b, 1999). For a study of Augustine’s epistolary correspondents, cf. Morgenstern (1993). An interesting case is that of Paulinus of Nola, who never met Augustine but extensively corresponded with him. Paulinus was educated by Ausonius, met Ambrose and Martin of Tours, and apart from Augustine also corresponded with Augustine’s friend Alypius and with (the Pelagian) Julian of Eclanum (Lienhard 1999: 628).

ing ‘nodes’: Ennodius, bishop of Ticino, but a native of Arles (Kennell 2000, Schröder 2007); Sidonius Apollinaris, bishop of Clermont (Loyer 1943, Harries 1994, Kaufmann 1995); Ruricius, bishop of Limoges (Mathisen 1999a); and Avitus, bishop of Vienne (Shanzer & Wood 2002, Heil 2011). These individuals were connected through various family relationships, took part in the theological debates of the time, and engaged in the exchange of highly polished letters, many of which have been preserved (Mathisen 1981). These aristocratic authors appear to be very aware of the sociocultural value of the classical (grammatical, rhetorical, literary) tradition in which they have been trained (Haarhoff 1920, Elton & Drinkwater 1992). As a consequence, they provide valuable remarks on the perceived differences between the high-prestige variety of Latin used by the upper class, and the low-prestige varieties used by ‘barbarians’ and members of lower social classes (Sect. 7.4, p. 255f.).

An important ‘hub’ within this Gaulish network was the monastic community established in around 405 by Honoratus (*c.*350–429) on what is now called St. Honorat, the smaller of two islands in the Mediterranean off Cannes, known together as Lérins. This intellectual center probably had a low level of Greek learning (Courcelle 2¹⁹⁴⁸: 216–221), but a strong bearing on contemporary doctrinal debates. Several leading figures of the 5th-century Gaulish church, such as Hilary of Arles (401–449), Vincentius of Lérins,³³ Salvian of Marseille (*c.*400–*c.*480), Faustus of Riez, Eucherius of Lyons and Caesarius of Arles (*c.*470–543), were trained at or connected to Lérins, and the ‘aristocratic’ monastery played a key role in the reception of, and the so-called ‘semi-Pelagian’ resistance against Augustine’s teachings on grace and predestination.³⁴

A third instance of an intellectual network—is—like the Lérins micro-network—‘institutional’ in nature and can be found in 6th-century Italy. In 534, Cassiodorus together with Pope Agapetus I (d. 536) tried, in vain, to establish a Christian school in Rome.³⁵ After his monastic conversion in 540, however, Cassiodorus managed to found a twin monastery at Vivarium and Castellum, near Scyllaceum, respectively for coenobitic and anachoretic monks. In Vivarium, the component of the monastery which housed an impressive library, Cassiodorus was assisted by a team of copyists and by three men named Bellator, Mutianus, and Epiphanius, who procured translations of exegetical works from Greek into Latin (cf. Gribomont 1985b: 145–146).³⁶ Cassiodorus also shows

³³ On Vincentius’ role in the development of Christian doctrine, cf. Guarino (2013).

³⁴ On Lérins and the ‘Gaulish’ reception of Augustine’s teachings, cf. Riché (³1972: 140–145), Mathisen (1993), Weaver (1999), and Greschat (2006).

³⁵ On this attempt, cf. Roger (1968 [1905]: 175–176), Riché (³1972: 173–177), and O’Donnell (1979: *passim*).

³⁶ On the scholarly life and the translation activities at Vivarium, cf. Roger (1968 [1905]: 176–

great admiration for the advanced bilingual competence of his friend Dionysius exiguus, who may have been his former teacher (O'Donnell 1979: 211), and of Boethius, who was a prolific scientific translator and whom Cassiodorus succeeded as Theoderic's *magister officiorum*.³⁷ Dionysius, too, procured Latin translations of Greek ecclesiastical works, which are frequently recommended by Cassiodorus in his *Institutiones* and several of which have been preserved (Sect. 5.2, p. 167f.).

These three cases may suffice to illustrate the importance of intellectual networks with regard to a historiographical investigation of linguistic ideas. Authors reflecting on linguistic issues, among many other things, are connected to each other in a variety of ways and can thus be assumed to have influenced each other intellectually or, in some cases, even to have discussed their ideas with one another.

This notion should be combined with a working distinction between 'central' and 'peripheral' authors. In specific terms, this means that authors with 'original' or 'innovative' linguistic ideas are distinguished from others who mainly 'perpetuate', 'codify', or 'transmit' a *status quo* based on other authors' innovative work. Of course, this distinction should be understood as a gradual and dynamic one, which will have to be differentiated in the course of this study. On a more general level, I will pay attention to the authors' scholarly authority, and to how this authority regulates or affects the circulation and transmission of linguistic ideas. On the basis of extant scholarly literature, it seems safe to start with the hypothesis that authors such as Jerome,³⁸ Augustine,³⁹ Boethius,⁴⁰ Cassiodorus,⁴¹ and Isidore⁴² will have a better claim to 'centrality' and 'authority' than others.

³⁷ Courcelle (2^e1948: 313–388), Marrou (7^e1965: 495), Riché (3^e1972: 204–212), and O'Donnell (1979: 177–222).

³⁸ On Boethius and his translation activities, cf. Adamo (1967), Marenbon (2003: 17–42), and Ebbesen (2011).

³⁹ For biographical studies or surveys on Jerome, cf. Cavallera (1922), Kelly (1975), Rebenich (1992, 2002), and Fürst (2003, 2004–2010).

⁴⁰ For biographical studies or surveys on Augustine, cf. Brown (2^e2000), Bonner (2^e1986, 1986–1994), Geerlings (2002a), Markus (1999b), and O'Donnell (1985, 2005).

⁴¹ For general studies or surveys on Boethius, cf. Chadwick (1981), Reiss (1982), Marenbon (2003, 2009), and Magee (2009).

⁴² Two general studies on Cassiodorus are O'Donnell (1979) and Hafner (2002). With regard to the political and historical context within which Cassiodorus moved, cf. Krautschick (1983) and Heather (1989, 1991).

⁴³ For a number of general studies on Isidore of Seville, cf. Brehaut (1912), Diesner (1973, 1977), Fontaine (1959, 1983), Henderson (2007a, 2007b), and Merrills (2013). See Hillgarth

In the light of the historical coverage of this study and the inclusion of often less well-known authors, the table below serves to provide a chronological frame of reference, based on the respective entries in Döpp & Geerlings (32002). Whereas ‘central’ authors according to the working distinction (in bold in the table below) have been introduced in the previous sections of this Introduction, ‘peripheral’ ones will be situated and contextualized when necessary in the course of this study.

Name	Year of birth	Year of death
Tertullian	c.160	c.220
Minucius Felix		<i>floruit</i> 2nd q. 3rd c.
Cyprian	c.200	258
Novatian		<i>fl. m.</i> 3rd c.
Commodian		<i>fl. m.</i> 3rd c.
Lactantius	c.250	325 (?)
Arnobius the Elder	—	c.327
Ausonius	c.310	c.394
Hilary of Poitiers	c.315	373
Firmicus Maternus		<i>fl. m.</i> 4th c.
Filastrius of Brescia	—	387–397
Pacian of Barcelona	—	<i>ante</i> 392
Ambrose	333/334	397
Chromatius of Aquileia	335–340	407/408 (?)
Gaudentius of Brescia	—	c.410
Rufinus	c.345	411/412
Ambrosiaster		<i>fl.</i> 366–384
Jerome	c.347	419
Maximus of Turin	—	408–423
Prudentius	c.348	—
Augustine	354	430
Paulinus of Nola	c.355	431
John Cassian	c.360	<i>post</i> 432
Sulpicius Severus	c.363	c.420
Claudius Marius Victorius	—	425–450

(1983, 1990) for a review of the scholarly literature on Isidore produced during the period 1936–1985.

(cont.)

Name	Year of birth	Year of death
Vincentius of Lérins	—	a. 450
Paulinus of Pella	376/377	p. 455
Peter Chrysologus	c.380	c.451
Eucherius of Lyons	c.380	c.450
Quodvultdeus	—	c.453
Prosper of Aquitaine	—	p. 455
Arnobius the Younger	—	p. 455
Leo the Great	end 4th c.	461
Cyprianus Gallus		<i>fl. beg. 5th c.</i>
Faustus of Riez	c.410	c.495
Apponius		<i>fl. p. 450/500</i>
Paulinus of Petricordia		<i>fl. c.470</i>
Claudianus Mamertus	c.425	c.474
Sidonius Apollinaris	430/431	480–490
Fulgentius of Ruspe	462/468	527/533
Fulgentius the mythographer		<i>fl. 5th/6th c.</i>
Gennadius of Marseille		<i>fl. 451–500</i>
Helpidius Rusticus		<i>fl. 451–550</i>
Dionysius Exiguus	c.470	526–556
Avitus of Vienne	451–500	(shortly) p. 517
Ennodius	473/474	521
Boethius	c.480	524
Jordanes		<i>fl. a. 551</i>
Facundus of Hermiane	—	568
Cassiodorus	c.485	c.580 (?)
Gregory of Tours	c.538	594
Arator		<i>fl. 501–600</i>
Venantius Fortunatus	530–540	p. 600
Gregory the Great	c.540	604
Isidore of Seville	c.560	636

6 Text Types, Literary Conventions, Pseudonymity and Anonymity

In addition to the points indicated above, a study of the linguistic ideas of early Christian Latin authors should take into account the textual and material context within which these ideas were formulated. A relevant issue in this connection is the heterogeneous character of the text corpus. The works covered by the corpus of primary texts can be categorized in a number of different genres or text types (cf. Van Rooy 2013: 46–47). Some frequently occurring text types are sermons, biblical commentaries, theological treatises, apologetic writings, polemical writings, letters (exegetical, literary, or ‘pragmatic’ [*Gebrauchsbriefe*]),⁴³ encyclopaedic works, dialogues, question-and-answer literature (*erotapokriseis*),⁴⁴ prefaces to translations, Bible epics,⁴⁵ occasional poetry, and miscellaneous works.

Different text types serve different purposes and apply different discursive or rhetorical strategies in order to accomplish this purpose. It is an evident notion, but one crucial to a sound analysis of the source texts, that the formulation of a linguistic idea is strongly influenced by the rhetorical or discursive purpose of the work or passage in which it occurs, as well as by literary commonplaces and by conventions of genre.⁴⁶ For early Christian literature more specifically, it is safe to say that linguistic ideas will often be formulated in order to make a theological or exegetic point. On a different note, it is important to stress that certain text types, such as letters (Thraede 1970) and prefaces (Janson 1964), are especially liable to an author trying to style himself in a particular way—a reality which has its implications for the interpretation of the linguistic ideas formulated in such passages. Likewise, polemical or laudatory passages containing respectively scathing or praising remarks on the linguistic competences of the person concerned should be interpreted with caution.

A second issue relates to anonymous and pseudepigraphous writings, which were included insofar as they are covered by Brepols’ online databases. Relevant cases are the anonymous *Consultationes Zacchaei et Apollonii* once attributed to Firmicus Maternus (Feiertag 2002), and the pseudo-Clementine *Recognitiones*, which only survive in Rufinus’ Latin translation of 407 (Hof-

43 On the subject of late antique epistolography, cf. Ebbeler (2009).

44 On the genre of question-and-answer literature in early Christianity, cf. Bardy (1932–1933) and Volgers & Zamagni (2004).

45 On some Latin epics on the New Testament (Juvencus, Sedulius, Arator), cf. Green (2006).

46 Similar observations on the historical and documentary reliability of ancient literary texts as sources for linguistic facts and metalinguistic reflections have been made by Banniard (1992a: 50), Fögen (2000: 23–26), and Adams (2003: 9–15).

mann 2002b: 156; Skeb 2002b: 613). When Rufinus translated this work from Greek into Latin, he believed it to be written by Clement of Rome, whose papacy probably lasted from 91/92 until 100/101 (Hofmann 2002a: 155; 2002b: 155). A complicated case is that of the *Commentarius in epistulas Paulinas* and *Quaestiones ueteris et noui testamenti* by the Roman exegete nicknamed ‘Ambrosiaster’ (cf. above, p. 16). Both works were issued anonymously, in various authorial recensions, and piecemeal.⁴⁷ As a consequence, they circulated under the names of other, authoritative writers, such as Hilary, Augustine, and Ambrose, until both the *Commentarius* and the *Quaestiones* were identified as the work of one and the same author, nicknamed ‘Ambrosiaster’, only in the latter decades of the 17th century (Lunn-Rockliffe 2007: 12). The anonymous or pseudopigraphous status of works and their contents has important consequences for the ways in which they circulate and are received. With this and the above observations in mind, we are ready to begin the analysis of early Christian Latin authors’ ideas on language, along the research questions gathered in the analytical grid.

⁴⁷ On the different authorial recensions of Ambrosiaster’s works, cf. the useful contributions in the thematic issue *REAug* 56/1. On the practical and material aspects of ‘publishing’ in (Christian) antiquity, cf. Marrou (1949) and Starr (1987).

PART 1

Language History

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The Origin and Nature of Language

The present chapter deals with early Christian Latin authors' ideas concerning the origin and nature of language. Although its primary focus is on the origin of language in terms of 'language history', this topic is inextricably tied in with the philosophical question of the nature of language. Accordingly, the first (major) section of this chapter will deal with the historical question of language origin,¹ while the three subsequent sections will explore the ramifications of the authors' views on language origin with regard to the nature of language.

In Christian thought, the topics of the origin and nature of language owe their relevance to a number of determining factors. To begin with, the Christian tradition in general is a strongly 'textual' one, and Christianity profiled itself as a 'religion of the Book' (cf. e.g. Jeffrey 1996). Secondly, Creation, as it is described in Gen. 1, is in itself a 'linguistic' act, since God is reported to create through speech (cf. e.g. Amsler 1976: 109; Trabant 2006: 15; Gontier 2009: 31). Thirdly, there is the 'linguistic' dimension of the 'Word' in Ioh. 1:1–3 and 23, intertwined with a long-standing (Jewish and) Christian tradition of *logos* theology. Fourth and lastly, the narrative of Gen. 2:19–20 and 23 explicitly reports how Adam was instigated by God to impose names on the living beings (cf. e.g. Dahan 1995; Law 2003: 101–102; Burton 2007: 20–21). However, in spite of the prominence of language in the latter pericope, these verses do not tell us anything about how Adam acquired language (cf. Albertz 1989: 7). In addition to these elements specific to a 'biblical' context, the origin and nature of language were prominent topics in philosophical thought throughout antiquity. In order to provide a historical framework for a discussion of early Christian Latin authors' views on the origin and nature of language, I will first try to outline what are for present purposes two prominent benchmarks in pagan thought on these issues.

Without any doubt, the most important discussion of the nature of language in pagan philosophy is to be found in Plato's (429–347 BC) dialogue *Cratylus*, which was concerned first and foremost with the nature and correctness

¹ For a broader perspective on ancient ideas concerning language origin, including non-Western traditions, cf. Allen (1948).

of the relation between words and things.² According to the different positions defended in the dialogue, the connection between words and the things they denote can be by nature (φύσει) or by convention (θέσει), including various intermediary positions (Rijlaarsdam 1978, Barney 2001).³ The dichotomy of φύσις and θέσις (or νόμος) had already become established in Greek philosophical thought of the 5th century BC (Heinimann 1980 [1945], Pohlenz 1953), and has remained an essential distinction in linguistic thought ever since (Joseph 2000). A more specific theme which is brought up extensively in the *Cratylus* and which would continually pop up in later discussions is that of the νομοθέτης or ὀνοματοθέτης, ‘lawgiver’ or ‘namegiver’, the divine or human (often exceptionally skilled) individual who was the one to impose names on things (*Cratylus* 388e; Gera 2003: 168–169). The issues of naming and reference formulated by Plato were refined by Aristotle, primarily in his *Categoriae* and *De interpretatione* (Modrak 2001), and further problematized by the Neoplatonist philosophers. By way of translations and commentaries (most importantly, by Cicero, Marius Victorinus, and Boethius), this line of thought was mediated to the Latin tradition.

Another foundational voice for reflection on language origin, partly from a different perspective, was the Hellenistic philosopher Epicurus (341–270 BC) (cf. Everson 1994b). Epicurus’ extensive discussion of the origins of language and society in book 12 of his *De natura* has unfortunately gone lost. However, much of Epicurus’ thought can be reconstructed from an authorial condensed version in the *Epistula ad Herodotum* 75–76, and from the Epicurean Roman philosopher Lucretius’ (c.99–c.55 BC) narrative in book 5 of his *De rerum natura* (Verlinsky 2005: 56–57; Schrijvers 1974). In Gera’s words (2003: 174), Lucretius provides ‘a detailed outline of the primitive beginnings of humans and the development of civilization (925–1457), in which he includes a passage on the origins of language (1028–90)’. Although the relation between Lucretius’ and Epicurus’ versions is not one of identity, we can assume with Verlinsky (2005: 65) that Lucretius’ narrative is ‘a reliable representation of Epicurus’ ideas on this subject’ (cf. Pigeaud 1983, Reinhardt 2008). Epicurus’ theory on the origin of language—in which the imposition of names also plays an important role

² Reflection on the problematic relation between name and thing can be traced back to early Greek thought (Kraus 1987).

³ On the different positions defended in *Cratylus*, cf. Gera (2003: 168): ‘Hermogenes of the *Cratylus* argues that words are correct designation[s] of objects simply because of convention and agreement, while Cratylus believes in a natural fit between word and thing. Socrates will argue for a middle ground between these two views.’ Cf. also De Pater & Swiggers (2000: 62–70).

(cf. above)—can be characterized as naturalistic, non-theological, and non-teleological. Insofar as it can be reconstructed from the abovementioned and other secondary sources, the Epicurean view involves that ‘human language develops’, naturally and beyond active human or divine control, ‘from unarticulated sounds, through articulation, into words assigned to things’ (Verlinsky 2005: 60–63 [60]).

The above is an incomplete presentation of pagan thought on the origin and nature of language, but it outlines the two primary benchmarks for my discussion of early Christian Latin authors’ comments on the issues concerned. Other prominent voices in the Latin tradition—such as Varro and Cicero—will be introduced when relevant in the course of the chapter. It is important to note that when discussing ancient views on the origin and nature of language, it is mostly impossible to draw a clear distinction between ‘language’ on the one hand and ‘speech’ on the other. When Gera (2003: 182) writes that in Greek thought, ‘language and speech are virtually interchangeable concepts’, because ‘language is almost always discussed in terms of its expression through a vocal channel, as speech’, this also seems to hold true for many relevant statements made by Christian Latin authors. There are of course notable exceptions, such as Augustine and Boethius, who draw a clear distinction between thought, language, and speech.

In my discussion of early Christian Latin authors’ views on the issues concerned, I will begin by investigating (1) what the authors say about the origin of language or speech. In order to explore their views on the nature of language, I will investigate more specifically (2) whether and how they construct a connection between divine providence and the typically human character of language and speech; (3) which authors discuss the anatomy of speech in terms of ‘musical instruments’ and ‘buildings’ and why they do so; and (4) how they elaborate on the (allegedly) transitory and narrow character of human language. I will contextualize and introduce the latter three research questions at the beginning of the corresponding sections.

1 Views on Language Origin

Lactantius: A Critique of Pagan Views on Language Origin

Lactantius’ views on the origin of human language can only be inferred from his writings in an indirect and/or negative way, because instead of clearly formulating his own ideas, the author primarily polemicizes with pagan views on the issue, most importantly the ‘Epicurean’ view, which he evidently could not accept because of its non-theological and non-teleological tenor (cf. above,

p. 27).⁴ It is important to note that given the complicated and vague transmission of Epicurus' ideas on language origin, I use the term 'Epicurean' in a general sense, referring to a philosophical current rather than to the individual philosopher.

The issue of language origin is briefly and obliquely touched upon in the third book of Lactantius' *Divinae institutiones*, which is entitled *De falsa sapientia* and which has the overall purpose of rebutting pagan philosophy (Gatzemeier 2013: 282).⁵ Taking the Christian principle of God's providence as his point of departure, Lactantius argues that God gifted man with a mouth and a tongue for the explicit twofold purpose of eating and talking. Accordingly, the apologist takes issue with the Epicurean denial of divine providence as it was voiced most importantly by Epicurus himself (fr. 370), by Lucretius (*De rerum natura* 4.822–857), and by Balbus in Cicero's *De natura deorum* (2.140) (cf. Bowen & Garnsey 2003: 199 n. 45; Palmer 2014: 124–125)—it should be emphasized with Ogilvie (1978: 84) that Lactantius never relies upon Epicurus' writings directly. Having begun to attack the naturalistic, 'haphazard' baseline of Epicurean philosophy in *Divinae institutiones* 3.17.15–16, Lactantius at 3.17.19–20 paraphrases Lucretius' *De rerum natura* 4.833–840 (Gatzemeier 2013: 286), writing that

in the generation of animals, no system of providence has been at work (*nihil ... prouidentiae ratio molita est*). Eyes were not made for seeing nor ears for hearing nor tongue for speech (*neque lingua ad loquendum*) nor feet for walking, because these organs were all created before there was seeing, hearing, talking or walking. They were therefore not created for use: use developed from them.

Having paraphrased the passage from Lucretius, Lactantius moves on to refute it. In his own opinion, man with all his bodily members was created in correspondence to a providential purpose, by the 'expert craftsmanship' of God (cf.

⁴ For a general discussion of Lactantius' 'negativ-abgrenzende Nutzung' of Lucretius in *Divinae institutiones* 3.17, cf. Gatzemeier (2013: 282–293).

⁵ Arnobius the Elder, too, indirectly deals with the human capacity of speech in the anti-pagan argument of his *Aduersus nationes*. When at 2.21–24 refuting Plato's doctrine of recollection or reminiscence, he argues that a human will not be able to speak and to designate the realities surrounding him if he is raised in isolation and without being spoken to. This implies that the actualization of the human capacity of speech is a part of his 'socialization', and that just as little as the knowledge of things, actualized human language is due to a Platonic reminiscence.

below, p. 45).⁶ As was indicated above, this is only indirect evidence for Lactantius' view on language origins, but it clearly shows that in the apologist's opinion, man possesses the capacity of speech thanks to God's providence—whether man developed this intended capacity gradually or received it instantly from God, together with the necessary anatomical 'gear'.

A more direct—if still negative—discussion of language origin by Lactantius can be found in *Divinae institutiones* 6.10.10–18. With Verlinsky (2005: 60) it should be noted that Lactantius' polemic in this passage is an important, though questionable, piece of evidence for the reconstruction of 'Epicurean' thought on the issue, precisely because it remains ultimately unclear what the actual philosophical source is for the view which Lactantius presents and subsequently attacks. Whereas Brandt (1891: 243–244; CSEL 19: *ad loc.*) held that Lactantius relied on Lucretius 5.1028–1090 and further elaborated on it, it has been suggested by Cole (1967: 60–69) that Lactantius' version of the opposite (pessimistic) opinion—along with similar accounts in Diodorus Siculus and Vitruvius—goes back to a (lost) Democritean source (Verlinsky 2005: 60 n. 6, 7). Due to the difficulty with identifying the precise philosophical provenance of the account Lactantius presents and subsequently rebuts, I will for now refer to its tenor as 'naturalistic' instead of 'Epicurean'.

In the naturalistic theory which Lactantius presents and subsequently refutes, the view on the origin of human language is closely connected to the view on the origins of human civilization. With reference to the latter aspect, Lactantius begins by formulating the point of view—which also derives from pagan sources (cf. below, p. 31) but can be assumed to reflect his own opinion—that 'God deliberately made us a social animal (*animal ... sociale*)', that 'we need to see ourselves in others', and that 'we deserve no help if we deny it to others'.

At 6.10.12 Lactantius proceeds to formulate the pessimistic account of the origins of civilization and language. In his presentation, some philosophers—without further specification—argue that the first people led a nomadic life and 'had no common bond of speech or law (*nec ulla inter se sermonis aut iuris uinculo*) to keep them together (*cohaererent*)'. However, some of these wandering people fell prey to wild animals, others were attacked but could escape, and still others saw how fellow people were attacked. Thus becoming aware of the danger, they ran away and tried to get help. In order to indicate their intentions (*uoluntatem suam significasse*), they first used gestures (*nutibus*) and later on 'made first attempts at speech' (*sermonis initia temptasse*). Subsequently, 'by

6 Lactantius in *Divinae institutiones* 6.21.6 designates God as the 'creator (*artifex*) of mind, voice and tongue'.

giving names (*nomina imprimendo*) to individual objects (*singulis quibusque rebus*) they slowly perfected a system of talking (*paulatim loquendi perfecisse rationem*)'. In addition, as they saw how many others were to be protected against wild animals, they began to build cities.

In the uncontrolled and gradual (*paulatim*) process during which—according to the pessimistic view—language originates, all people exposed to the danger contribute to developing a communication system. This process falls into three stages, namely (1) the use of gestures and body language (cf. Fögen 2001, 2009), (2) the first attempts at speech, presumably inarticulate sounds with an undefined meaning, and (3) the elaboration of a 'language system' (*loquendi ... ratio*) by the arbitrary but permanent imposition of names on things. It is interesting to see how the origin of language is closely intertwined not only with the foundation of cities, but also with the creation of law. It is exactly language and law which give rise to the bond that keeps people together during the haphazard development of civilization (cf. Gera 2003: *passim*).

For Lactantius, the specific problem with this pessimistic, naturalistic account is that people only begin developing language because they are forced to do so by the threat of wild animals. This explanation, which is paralleled in Diodorus Siculus' *Bibliotheca historica* 1.90.1 (Cole 1967: 64), emphasizes the utilitarian perspective on language origin over a teleological (providential) one (cf. Verlinsky 2005: 60). As such, it is a notion which Lactantius cannot possibly accept. Although this account may not be Epicurean strictly speaking, it does share the naturalist and rationalist essence of Epicurean philosophy very clearly. As Lifschitz (2012: 17) puts it, Epicurus precisely 'rewrote existing accounts of the origins of natural phenomena and human institutions, seeking to limit the inexplicable and the extraordinary'. In an account of this tenor, there was of course no place for providence, a divine origin of language, or a divinely authorized namegiver. As Gera (2003: 176) points out, the latter idea is also explicitly refuted by Lucretius (5.1043–1055).

The Christian apologist is evidently bound to disagree with the opinion that human speech and society originated by chance, from human contact forced by animals, without any involvement of divine providence.⁷ Indeed, he immediately refutes the paraphrase he has just given, arguing that it is 'nonsense, unworthy of human intelligence' to assume that men would not have come together 'nor were to find a cause for [or: system of] speech' (*nec loquendi rationem repertos*) if they had not been attacked by wild animals.

⁷ Pace Gera (2003: 176), who seems to read the pessimistic account as reflecting Lactantius' own opinion.

Instead, he approvingly refers to other philosophers—again without further specification—who held that ‘humanity itself’ (*ipsa ... humanitas*) was the reason why people started to unite and—it is implied—to use language. This point of view leaves room for Lactantius’ basic assumption that God created man not only by purpose, but also willingly as a ‘social animal’. As such, man did not need the example of ‘lower animals’ in order to come together and make a beginning with speech and civilization.

Similarly, Lactantius argues at 29.34.2–4 of *Epitome diuinorum institutionum*—a possibly authorial abbreviated version of the *Diuinae institutiones* (Schwarze 2002a: 444)—that people are not born for crime in the same way as wild animals are, ‘since we are a social and societal animal (*animal sociale atque commune*)’.⁸ In order to corroborate this point, he refers to the fact that even wild animals, which cannot live but from prey and blood, still spare animals of their own kind. Consequently, he states that a human, who is joined (*copulatus*) to his fellow humans ‘both by the intercourse of language (*commercio linguae*) and the communion of senses’, is all the more bound to spare and even to love other humans.

It is unfortunate, from our point of view, that Lactantius, in rebutting the naturalistic view on language origin, does not formulate his own stance more explicitly. Presumably, Lactantius is—in accordance with a recurrent apologetic strategy—‘substituting’ one pagan philosophical viewpoint which does not contradict Christian principles for another one which does. For the optimistic view—which he integrates in a providential framework—that man is (created as) a social animal and is as such inclined by his own nature to associate and communicate with others of his species, Lactantius could rely on a pagan philosophical tradition stretching back, over Cicero, Isocrates and others (cf. Gera 2003: 142–144), to Aristotle, who states in *Politica* 1.1.1253a that ‘man is by nature a communal animal’ (ὁ ἄνθρωπος φύσει πολιτικὸν ζῶον). In the light of Lactantius’ thorough acquaintance with Cicero and on grounds of the fact that Lactantius ‘certainly had a complete text’ of *De republica* (Ogilvie 1978: 65), it seems safe to assume that Cicero’s *De republica* 3.2.3—which will be quoted and discussed below (p. 34)—provided the direct source (or one of the direct sources) for the optimistic pagan alternative deployed in Lactantius’ apology.

⁸ Cf. *Diuinae institutiones* 6.17.20, where man is described as a *mite ac sociale animal*.

From Lactantius to Augustine: Scattered Comments

During the period stretching from Lactantius to Augustine, various authors comment on the origin of language or speech passingly and from different perspectives. This is the case in the pseudo-Clementine *Recognitiones*, which were originally written in Greek around the middle of the 4th century but translated into Latin by Rufinus (407). As such, they circulated in the Latin West and it is only in this form that they have been preserved. It should be emphasized that this work contains numerous ‘peripheral’ traditions (gnostic, anti-Pauline, and ‘Judaizing’), and that it apparently remained unimportant in Christian Latin literature (Hofmann 2002b: 156; Skeb 2002b: 613). At 1.30.5 of this work, the primeval language, identified as Hebrew (Sect. 2.2, p. 63), is explicitly presented as a divinely given language. The author writes that until men began to worship idols in the fifteenth generation from Adam onwards, ‘the monopoly was held by the language of the Hebrews, which was given by God to mankind (*diuinitus humano generi data*)’ (Hilhorst 2007: 780). Whereas the notion that the human *capacity* of language is willed or given by God is common (and inevitable), this is the most straightforward designation of (the primeval) language as a divinely given entity occurring in the entire literature of early Latin Christianity. However, given the ‘peripheral’ nature of the work as a whole, this explicit designation should be considered atypical for early Christian Latin authors’ views on the issue.

Another statement on the divinely given character of (the primeval) language can be found in the works of Ambrosiaster, who in *Quaestiones ueteris et noui testamenti* 108.4 presents post-Babelic Hebrew as the (indirect) continuation of the primeval language (Sect. 2.2, p. 70f.), and states that God gave post-Babelic Hebrew to Abraham in order to mark a ‘renewal of faith’. In narrating this event, Ambrosiaster writes that in this way were ‘restored to men the worship and speech of God (*Dei culturam et sermonem*)’, which had previously been given (*qui datus prius fuerat*) to the use of men (*in usum hominum*). This passage implies that Ambrosiaster considers Hebrew to be not only the primeval language but also the language which was given by God to Adam in paradise (Sect. 2.3, p. 86). Ambrosiaster’s characterization of (the primeval) language as divinely given should undoubtedly be explained with reference to the exegete’s more than common acquaintance with Jewish traditions in general and with the book of Jubilees in particular (Lunn-Rockliffe 2007: 41–42; Eskhult 2013: 105; Denecker 2014a: 15–17; Sect. 2.2, p. 62f.). Remarkably, Ambrosiaster seems to give a contradictory account of language origin in *Quaestiones ueteris et noui testamenti* 100.2, stating that God disapproves of those who prefer beautiful words to good deeds, and that accordingly, one should not praise the phrasing but the sense of words. In order to urge this point, he argues that ‘words

have been invented (*inuenta sunt*) in order to signify things (*propter res significandas*)'. Although the textual evidence is very slim, this seems to imply a gradual and conventionalist view on naming which is hard, though not impossible, to reconcile with the concept of a divinely and instantly given language. A possible reconciliation would involve that the entity of language is divinely given but remains 'productive', i.e. that it allows for the creation of new words.

Apart from Ambrosiaster and the *Recognitiones*, I have been able to identify only brief and oblique references to the (divine) origin of language and/or speech in early Christian Latin literature.⁹ Pacian of Barcelona in *Ep. 2.4.6*—when defending himself for having quoted a verse from Vergil (Costanza 1978)—argues that all things, including pagan literature, come from God, and that there is no such thing as a separate language of the Muses in addition to the 120 languages of mankind (Sect. 3.3, p. 109), which all come from God. He states in conclusion that 'all words and all kinds of languages (*omnium genera linguarum*)' are 'inspired by God' (*a Deo inspirata*). Lastly, Jerome in *Commentarii in Isaiam 1.2.20/21* states that the silver and gold from Is. 2:20 symbolize speech and sense (*pro sermone et sensu*) respectively, and argues that both of these are abused in the worship of idols, although they 'were given by God to men (*a Deo hominibus data*)', in order for them either to pronounce or to understand God and to praise their Creator'. Whereas the above statements each belong to different exegetical and/or rhetorical contexts, they all seem to imply that language or, at least, the capacity of speech, was given to mankind by God. None of these oblique references seems to allow for, or to presuppose a more gradual, naturalistic view on language origin.

Augustine: Shifting Viewpoints?

The origin of human language is an important theme in Augustine's works and shows an interesting evolution over time. An early discussion of the theme (386–387) can be found in *De ordine*, one of Augustine's three 'Cassiciacum dialogues' (McWilliam 1999a: 135; 1999b; Trelenberg 2009) which is, due to its early date, strongly influenced by pagan philosophy, especially by way of Varro (Cipriani 1996) and, probably more directly, by way of Cicero (Testard 1958: 140 n. 6; Pacioni 1999). A crucial Ciceronian passus with regard to the topic of

⁹ Prudentius in *Liber Peristephanon* 10.928–930 has the martyr Romanus—whose tongue was cut out as a punishment—say that the tongue never fails when someone speaks of Christ, and that one 'should not ask by which organ words are regulated while the very giver of words (*ipse uerborum dator*) is being proclaimed'. It should be emphasized, however, that in the context of *Liber Peristephanon*, this phrase might as well refer to poetical inspiration.

language origin is *De republica* 3.2.3, which is discussed by Gera (2003: 164) and which in her translation reads as follows:

And when [reason] found men with stammering voices uttering unformed and confused sounds (*inconditis uocibus inchoatum quiddam et confusum sonantes*), she separated these sounds into distinct classes (*incidit has et distinxit in partis*), assigning words to things as a kind of distinguishing mark (*ut signa quaedam sic uerba rebus impressit*). Thus with the most pleasant tie of speech (*iucundissimo inter se sermonis uinclo*) she bound together (*colligauit*) previously solitary men (*homines ... antea dis-sociatos*).

In this passage and more concisely in *De officiis* 1.50–51 (Gera 2003: 165 n. 180), Cicero is thus seen constructing an intimate connection between (1) reason or ‘mind’, (2) speech and the capacity of language, and (3) society. Whereas the former two provide the basis and ‘binder’ for society, it is society that provides the actual ‘originating context’ for language as a system. For this connection Cicero undoubtedly relied on a (Greek) philosophical tradition ultimately going back to Aristotle (cf. above, p. 31). The explicit reference to man’s reason and sociability as the motives for associating and communicating with others involves an appreciably more optimistic—less utilitarian and naturalistic—pagan view on language origin than the one refuted by Lactantius (cf. above, p. 29f.), where the development of a language system is initiated by the threat formed by wild animals. As indicated above, the alternative put forward by Lactantius is probably based on the account given by Cicero. It seems safe to assume that Augustine, too, relies on Cicero’s accounts when he discusses the origins of language and civilization himself in *De ordine* 2.12.35 (on this passage cf. Rotta 1909: 90; Duchrow 1965: 57, 94–95, 118–119; Brasa Díez 1979; Fyler 1988: 77; Burton 2007: 20, 175). However, it has also been suggested that Augustine’s exposition might actually go back to a lost portion from Varro’s works (Collart 1954: 52; Fontaine 1959: 49; Desbordes 1990: 77–78). In *De ordine* 2.12.35 Augustine argues that

what is the reasonable part in us (*quod in nobis est rationale*), namely what relies on reason (*quod ratione utitur*) and either does or follows rational things (*rationabilia uel facit uel sequitur*) found that words needed to be imposed on things (*imponenda rebus uocabula*), because man was bound by a certain natural bond in the company of those (*quia naturali quodam uinculo in eorum societate astringebatur*) with whom he had this very reason in common (*cum quibus illi erat ipsa ratio communis*)—and

because people cannot be associated to each other very firmly (*nec homini homo firmissime sociari potest*) would they not speak to each other and in this way pour out—as it were—their minds and thoughts to each other (*nisi colloquerentur atque ita sibi mentes suas cogitationesque quasi refunderent*).

The development of a linguistic communication system is thus presented by Augustine as motivated by human reason and sociability—not by an external threat—and as providing the basis and principal ‘binder’ for human society (cf. Hankey 1999 on *ratio* in Augustine).¹⁰ Furthermore, language origin is understood in terms of a (probably) gradual and (certainly) rational process of naming within the very context of human society. Given Augustine’s explicitly societal conception of this process, it seems safe to infer that this process of naming is arbitrary in first instance, but permanent due to subsequent societal sanctioning. Augustine indeed specifies that the words which were imposed on things were ‘meaningful sounds’ (*significantes ... sonos*)—again a definition going back, by way of Stoicism, to Aristotle—which were to be used, in a certain sense, as an interpreter (*quasi interprete*) bringing people together in ‘joint reference’ (*ad eos sibi copulandos sensu*). Attention should be drawn to the absence of any divine involvement in the development of a language system according to this account.

A later and shorter reference to language origin can be found in *Ep. 102*, a letter addressed to Deogratias which dates to between 406 and 412. It is important to note that Augustine in this letter provides an answer to six critical questions with regard to Christian doctrine. Deogratias had ‘forwarded’ these questions to Augustine after having been confronted with them by a pagan acquaintance whom he had in common with Augustine. In § 10 of this letter, Augustine concisely grants that ‘human beings can by a certain social pact (*pacto quodam societatis*), as it were, institute (*instituere*) sounds for a language by which they may share with one another their ideas’. Here again, language is presented as a socially—not divinely—sanctioned system of communication by which people are able to share rational contents with each other. It seems safe to state that in both passages discussed until now, Augustine presents language origin as a gradual and rational process, situated in human society and involving an arbitrary act of naming, rather than as an instantaneous and divinely managed

¹⁰ When dealing with the events of Pentecost (Ch. 6, p. 197f.), Augustine in *Sermo 71.17.28* incidentally states that it is ‘in the languages (*per linguas*) that the union of the human race (*consociatio ... generis humani*) consists’.

event.¹¹ This pagan philosophical tenor is certainly to be explained with reference to the early date of *De ordine* and the specific apologetic context of *Ep.* 102.

Whereas this pagan philosophical tenor does not necessarily contradict ‘Christian principles’—cf. above (p. 31) for Lactantius’ use of it—the Christian or biblical perspective is much more tangible in Augustine’s commentaries on the book of Genesis. In his early *De Genesi contra Manichaeos* (388/390), Augustine argues at 2.5.6 that before the Fall, man understood God inwardly and directly, but that afterwards, ‘human words’ became necessary in order to learn God’s will (*doctrina de humanis uerbis*). In this commentary, language is thus presented as the consequence of the Fall, i.e. of human sin (cf. Duchrow 1961: 370; Jackson 1969: 27; Rist 1994: 37).

In *De Genesi ad litteram libri duodecim*, which was completed in 415, Augustine at 9.12.20 starts from the observation that Adam according to the account of Genesis gives names to the birds and the animals of the earth, but not to the fish and the other creatures living in the water (cf. Fyler 1988: 76). He furthermore observes—in a way which strongly concurs with the gradual and realistic account of *De ordine* (cf. above, pp. 34–35)—that in the different languages of mankind, ‘all these things are called by names which people have given them by speech (*quemadmodum eis homines loquendo nomina posuerunt*)’, and that ‘they are all called by a diversity of names according to the diversity of languages among the nations (*pro diuersitate linguarum gentilium*)’ (cf. Fyler 1988: 76). On this basis, Augustine argues that the narrative should rather be read symbolically, as a prefiguration of future events. More specifically, he states that it is of little importance to find out exactly which language was the ‘primeval’ language, i.e. which language was in use from Creation until the events of Babel (Ch. 2, p. 57f.). However, he goes on to argue that whatever language it may have been, this was certainly the language that Adam used,

and it is in this language (*et in ea lingua*), if it persists until today (*si adhuc usque permanet*) that the words were articulated (*sunt istae uoces articulatae*) with which the first man put names to the animals and the flying things (*quibus primus homo animalibus terrestribus et uolatilibus nomina imposuit*).

¹¹ Cf. Borst (1958: 392): ‘Doch bald nach der Konversion, im Jahre 386, wurde die Sprache, wie alles Irdische, für ihn theologisch relevant: Sie sei zwar Gottes Werk, aber die Namengebung, wie sie Gen. 2, 19 f. schildere, entspringe aus der Tat des Menschen, veranlasst durch *illud, quod in nobis est rationale*. Vom Menschen geschaffen, dient die Sprache dem Menschen zum Austausch der Gedanken und zur Festigung der Brüderlichkeit, *ad copulandos animos*.’

In this remarkably skeptic treatment, the phrase *si adhuc usque permanet* presumably refers to the continuity between the nameless primeval language and post-Babelic Hebrew, which Augustine defends extensively in *De ciuitate Dei* 16 (Sect. 2.2, p. 77f.). The primary difference between this passage and those discussed above is that Augustine here explicitly follows the biblical coordinates concerning the origin of language, namely Gen. 2:19–20 and 23, where Adam, on God's instigation, gives names to the living beings. Although the biblical coordinates still allow for a gradual process of naming, they exclude the possibility of societal sanctioning—since Adam's naming takes place in a 'social vacuum' (Gera 2003: 179–180; cf. Trabant 2006: 16).¹² In addition, the divine 'management' or 'supervision' of Adam's naming at least weakens its 'human' and 'rational' character—although it seems that Adam is free to give the names he prefers and this act can thus still be considered 'arbitrary' to some degree (cf. Trabant 2006: 17–18).

If we combine the above elements of Augustine's 'biblical' view on language origin, an important implication is that one should reckon with several successive acts of naming throughout history, namely (1) once by Adam—presumably in 'Hebrew'—on the sixth day of Creation, then (2) in the 71 languages which in Augustine's opinion arose in addition to Hebrew during the events of Babel, and lastly (3) in the different new languages into which the 72 post-Babelic languages in Augustine's opinion further diversified (Sect. 3.3, p. 110f.). It can be suggested, but it is nowhere explicitly said by Augustine, that the later process of naming (and, accordingly, of language development) is to be understood in the 'Ciceronian' terms which Augustine deploys in *De ordine* (cf. above, pp. 34–35). On this suggestion, there is in fact a considerable continuity between Augustine's early ('pagan') and later ('biblical') points of view. This can be seen rather clearly from Augustine's realistic observation on namegiving as a historical process in the different languages of mankind, which occurs at the outset of *De Genesi ad litteram libri duodecim* 9.12.20 (cf. above, p. 36).

Augustine's position is more polemical in *De ciuitate Dei*, another one of his later works which was expressly conceived as an anti-pagan, apologetic work. In this connection, Augustine rebuts pagan religious beliefs on the origin of language and the capacity of speech. Arguing that it is the 'one and true God' of Christianity who gave people 'the faculty and use of speech' (*sermonis facultatem usumque*; 7.30), at 7.14 he ridicules—like Tertullian in *De testimonio*

¹² *Contra Albertz* (1989: 7): 'Nach der Erzählung Gen 2 ist Sprache somit zuerst und vornehmlich Kommunikation'.

animae 5.5–6—the pagan opinion that Mercury (Hermes) is the giver of human language (cf. Gera 2003: 115–118). It is interesting to see how Augustine phrases his point of view differently in dialogue with the Graeco-Roman views on the pagan pantheon.¹³ Isolated elements from Augustine’s present argument were integrated by Isidore in *Etym.* 5.30.8 and 8.11.45.

Boethius: The Aristotelian and Neoplatonist Vein

A rather exceptional view on the origins of human language can be found in the works of Boethius. The question whether Boethius can be considered a ‘Christian’ has long been a matter of debate but is now commonly answered in the positive (cf. e.g. Bradshaw 2009). However, Christian elements in Boethius’ works are sensibly downplayed or even obscured by the influence of the tradition of Neoplatonist commentaries on Aristotle, in which Boethius was excellently versed, not least thanks to the training he probably received in Alexandria under the late Neoplatonist Ammonius (435/445–517/526) (Courcelle 2¹⁹⁴⁸: 299–300; Berschin 1980: 105; Glei 2002: 127). Boethius provides a short and indirect account of language origin at the outset of his commentary on Aristotle’s *Categoriae* (PL 64: 159A–C; cf. Marenbon 2003: 22).¹⁴ It is important to note that the issue of language origin has only ancillary status in this passage, in that it primarily serves to establish the difference between ‘names for things’ (*nomina rerum*) and ‘names for names’ (*nomina nominum*) (McInerny 2²⁰¹²). The gist of Boethius’ metalinguistic exposition is that during a first stage of naming, people put names on realities, whereas during a second stage, they gave names to different types of words. Boethius argues that during the first stage,

while things were at hand (*rebus praeiacentibus*) and remained in their own original and natural disposition, the human race was the only one (*humanum solum genus exstitit*) able to impose names on these things (*quod rebus nomina posset imponere*). Hence it came about that the mind

¹³ A parallel and, possibly, the source for Augustine’s argument can be found in Arnobius the Elder’s *Aduersus nationes* 3.32: ‘Mercury’s name, too, means something like a kind of go-between (*quasi quidam Medicurrius*); and because conversation runs between two speakers (*quod inter loquentes duo media currat*) and speech is reciprocal (*et reciproceretur oratio*), hence the agreement of the character suggested by this name. Accordingly, if this is the case, Mercury is not the name of a god but of speech and the exchange of sound (*non est dei Mercurius nomen sed sermonis reciprocantis et uocis*)’.

¹⁴ For a global discussion of language-philosophical issues in Boethius, cf. Reiss (1982: 28–54) and Cameron (2009).

of man pursued all things one by one (*sigillatim omnia prosecutus*) and applied words on each of them separately (*singulis uocabula rebus aptaret*).

It was in this way that during the first stage of naming, different bodies or objects were given different names, such as ‘man’, ‘stone’, ‘wood’, ‘colour’, ‘father’, and long measures such as ‘two-foot-long’ and ‘three-foot-long’. It is important to note that the capacity of naming and, thus, of language is presented as an exclusively human one (Sect. 1.2, p. 44f.), and that the act of naming in Boethius’ presentation has a rather strong ‘natural’ component, as names are said to be ‘made apt’ or ‘moulded’ (*aptaret*) on things while the latter are still ‘in their own original and natural disposition’.

Boethius goes on to expound that when the names had been ordained, the one who was giving names—he does not identify a specific ‘namegiver’—in the second stage ‘went back to the proper signification and shapes of the words themselves (*ipsorum ... uocabulorum proprietates figurasque*)’ in order to give names to the different types of words or, more specifically, to the different parts of speech. Accordingly, the kind of word which is inflected by cases was called a ‘noun’, while the type that is conjugated along tenses was called a ‘verb’. In summarizing, Boethius states that the first stage of naming (*prima ... nominum positio*) was concerned with the externals (*res*) that were ‘subjected to the understanding or the senses’ and was done according to the signification of a word. The second stage of naming (*secunda consideratio or positio*), to the contrary, was performed according to the properties and shapes (*proprietates ... figurasque*) of words, so that words were indicated by other words. When dealing with the problem of species words and genus words in the same commentary (Marenbon 2003: 22), at 183c–184b, Boethius again refers to a further unspecified namegiver, *qui primus ... dixit*.

McInerny (2012: 43–44) makes it clear that Boethius, having established the distinction between *nomina rerum* and *nomina nominum*, limits the scope of the *Categoriae* (and of his commentary on it) to types and properties of things (substance, quantity, quality, relation, etc.), thus excluding from its subject matter types and properties of nouns. In other words, when he establishes a distinction between a first and a second stage of naming, he does so in order to exclude those names belonging to the second stage (the *nomina nominum*) from the subject matter of his commentary. Nevertheless, it has become clear from the above analysis that in doing so, Boethius offers a fairly clear outline of how human language gradually developed. As was already indicated, Boethius’ commentary on Aristotle’s *Categoriae* draws heavily on the tradition of Neoplatonic commentaries on Aristotle, and on Porphyry in

particular (cf. e.g. Marenbon 2003: 22; Law 2003: 149–150). For this reason, the account of language origin given by Boethius differs significantly from those given by other early Christian Latin authors in that it lacks a theological context. More specifically, Boethius does not deal at all with the question whether language or the capacity of speech were given by God, nor does he attempt to identify his namegiver as Adam, as the account of Genesis could have encouraged him to do.

Isidore: Language Origins in Function of Etymological Reconstruction

Due to the very scope and methodological underpinnings of Isidore's *Etymologiae* (cf. e.g. Engels 1962), the origin and nature of language are crucial themes in the encyclopaedist's thought. However, when one wants to discuss Isidore's ideas on the origin and nature of language, one remains necessarily confined to the level of tentative (re)construction. It seems useful to quote in this connection the following general remark made by Fontaine (1959: 51): 'La philosophie isidorienne du langage, si l'on peut employer une expression aussi ambitieuse pour désigner des *membra disiecta*, est faite des restes d'un éclectisme déjà ancien'. It should thus be held in mind that Isidore does not himself put forward a coherent theory of the origin and nature of language, and that the question of his sources is a highly complicated one, all the more so because Isidore made extensive use of 'l'héritage scolaire indirect'—often lost and possibly anonymous commentaries, lexica and notes—rather than actually relying on the authors and works which he references (Fontaine 1959: *passim*).

There are two *loci classici* for Isidore's views on the topics at issue, namely *Etym.* 1.29.1–3 and 12.1.1–2. In *Etym.* 1.29.1–3 Isidore posits and explains the principle of etymology, which is foundational to his entire encyclopaedia.¹⁵ He defines the technique of *etymologia* rather succinctly as 'the origin of words

¹⁵ In full, the relevant text portion reads as follows: *Etymologia est origo uocabulorum, cum uis uerbi uel nominis per interpretationem colligitur. Hanc Aristoteles σύμβολον, Cicero adnotationem nominauit, quia nomina et uerba rerum nota facit exemplo positio; utputa flumen, quia fluendo creuit, a fluendo dictum. Cuius cognitio saepe usum necessarium habet in interpretatione sua. Nam dum uideris unde ortum est nomen, citius uim eius intellegis. Omnis enim rei inspectio etymologia cognita planior est. Non autem omnia nomina a ueteribus secundum naturam imposita sunt, sed quaedam et secundum placitum, sicut et nos seruis et possessionibus interdum secundum quod placet nostrae uoluntati nomina damus. Hinc est quod omnium nominum etymologiae non reperiuntur, quia quaedam non secundum qualitatem, qua genita sunt, sed iuxta arbitrium humanae uoluntatis uocabula acceperunt.*

(*origo uocabulorum*), when the force of a verb or a noun (*uis uerbi uel nominis*) is inferred through interpretation (*per interpretationem colligitur*)' (cf. Schweickard 1985; Amsler 1989: 137–141; and cf. Amsler 1976, 1986). Succinct as it is, this definition seems to include two interrelated components,¹⁶ namely (1) a definition of *etymologia* as 'word origin'—which accords to Varro's preferred periphrase *origo uerborum* or *uocabulorum* for *etymologia* (Collart 1954: 251)—and (2) a definition of *etymologia* as an interpretive strategy by which to reestablish the original form of a word and thus to grasp the essence of its referent. Isidore does not thematize the composite nature of his definition, but specifies the second component, arguing that one can understand the force of a word more quickly when one can see where it comes from. This component of the definition is essential to the methodology of his etymological encyclopaedia.

The latter component of the definition can be connected to *Etym.* 1.7.1, where Isidore states that a noun (*nomen*) is as it were a 'denoter' (*notamen*), 'because by its designation it makes things known (*notas efficiat*) to us', and where he formulates the general principle that 'unless you know its name (*ni si enim nomen scieris*), the knowledge of a thing perishes (*cognitio rerum perit*)'. Whereas Isidore fails to mention the actual Greek etymology for *etymologia* as ἔτυμον λέγειν, 'to articulate the true sense' (Fontaine 1959: 41), he thus believes that 'etymology' as the original, 'adequate' form of a word has a 'revealing' capacity with regard to the essence of its referent. On this basis, 'etymology' is also an epistemic and heuristic strategy by which to grasp the essence of a thing by reconstructing the original form of its name. With regard to the inadequate assumption underlying the former component of the definition, one can repeat Collart's statement (1954: 254, with reference to Varro), that 'cette théorie de la convenance idéale du signe à la chose signifiée ... est une erreur commune à toute l'antiquité et qui apparaît bien avant la formation de la science grammaticale'.

In what follows, Isidore explicitly connects his discussion of etymology to the issue of the origin(s) of language. He argues that it is not always possible to retrieve the origins (etymologies) for words, because 'the ancients' (*ueteres*)

¹⁶ Fontaine (1959: 41) problematizes this definition in a different way: 'La définition est doublement décevante: elle ignore jusqu'à l'étymologie du terme même; elle confond l'explication étymologique avec toute explication grammaticale d'un mot donné, incluant ainsi les gloses, les définitions et même les "différences" sous une formule trop peu précise. Le seul mérite de ce gauchissement est qu'il approprie la définition au contenu réel des *Origines*. Car l'étymologie proprement dite y cède souvent la place à de tout autres types d'explication grammaticale.'

did not consistently impose names on things ‘according to nature’ (*secundum naturam*) and ‘according to their innate qualities’ (*secundum qualitatem, qua genita sunt*), but sometimes gave names ‘according to their individual decision’ (*secundum placitum*; cf. Engels 1963: 105) and ‘by the judgment of human will’ (*iuxta arbitrium humanae uoluntatis*). The latter case, Isidore explains, is comparable to the situation where people give names to their slaves and possessions, ‘according to what pleases our will’ (*quod placet nostrae uoluntati*). A first note to this is that the Greek practice of giving entirely new names to one’s ‘barbarian’ slaves was invoked—from Hermogenes in Plato’s *Cratylus* (384d) onwards and commonly in the Neoplatonist commentary tradition (Gera 2003: 208)—as an argument in favour of the conventional character of naming. The commonplace is also deployed by Varro in *De lingua Latina* 8.2.6, 8.3.10, and 8.9.21, and this is probably an important stage by which it took root in the Latin tradition. Secondly, it should be pointed out with Fontaine (1959: 49–50) that Isidore here seems to propose a sensible reconciliation of the ‘naturalist’ and the ‘conventionalist’ poles in the debate on the nature of naming (φύσις vs. θέσις or νόμος), a reconciliation which had already been attempted by Plato in his *Cratylus* (cf. e.g. Modrak 2001: 14–19).

Due to the substance and phrasing of this reconciliation, we are led to assume that Isidore is relying on the Aristotelian and Neoplatonist tradition which had in various direct and indirect ways entered the Latin tradition (Cicero, Marius Victorinus, Boethius, and the anonymous school tradition). This assumption is substantiated by Isidore’s remark that etymology is termed σύμβολον by Aristotle and *adnotatio*—actually *nota*—by Cicero. As Fontaine (1959: 41–42) and Barney *et al.* (2006: 54) point out (cf. Collart 1954: 252), this information goes back to Cicero’s *Topica* 8.35, and we have thus sufficient ground to assume that this work—along with Boethius’ commentary on it (Barney *et al.* 2006: 22)—was an important way by which Isidore could rely on the Aristotelian tradition. Isidore’s use of the phrase *secundum placitum* (also cf. below, p. 43f.), which is of Boethian facture, confirms that Boethius was indeed a source on which Isidore relied directly or indirectly (Engels 1963: 105, 111). In addition, de Poerck (1970: 217) identifies a prominent source in Quintilian 1.6.28–29,¹⁷ and cautiously suggests (1970: 219) that Isidore in some way combines the material from Quintilian with preserved or lost elements

¹⁷ The relevant passage reads as follows: *Etymologia, quae uerborum originem inquirit, a Cicerone dicta est notatio, quia nomen eius apud Aristotelen inuenitur σύμβολον, quod est 'nota'. Nam uerbum ex uerbo ductum, id est ueriloquium, ipse Cicero, qui finxit, reformidat ... Haec habet aliquando usum necessarium, quotiens interpretatione res, de qua quaeritur, eget.*

from Varro. With specific regard to the act of naming, attention should be drawn to Varro's *De lingua Latina*, where the polymath dealt extensively with the question of 'how words have been imposed on things' (8.1.1 [cf. 7.7.110]: *quemadmodum uocabula rebus essent imposta*) (Taylor 1974: 10–11 [tr.]; Collart 1978b: 8), and made a distinction between *declinatio naturalis* and *declinatio uoluntaris*. The tension between nature and convention, too, is a prominent one throughout Varro's discussion of linguistic origin and change (Taylor 1974: *passim*; Collart 1954: 258–278).

In the second *locus classicus*, *Etym.* 12.1.1, Isidore is introducing the chapter on different kinds of animals and their names by stating that it was Adam who for the first time (*primum*) 'conferred names (*uocabula indidit*) on all the animals'. In agreement with the biblical account (Gen. 2:19–20), Isidore specifies that Adam did so by 'assigning a name to each one (*appellans unicuique nomen*) [partly] according to an arrangement at hand (*ex praesenti institutione*)', and [partly] 'according to the position in nature that it holds' (*iuxta condicionem naturae cui seruiret*). As is pointed out *ad locum* by André (1986: 38 n. 1), Isidore's statement is in part a quotation from Tertullian's *De uirginibus uelandis* 5.2, to which it owes its possibly 'legalistic' ring (cf. *iuxta condicionem*). While Isidore, by quoting Tertullian's words, explicitly connects the philosophical debate on the nature of naming to the biblical coordinates, he is also able to maintain the reconciliation between the 'naturalist' (*iuxta condicionem naturae*) and the 'conventionalist' positions (*ex praesenti institutione*) which was proposed in *Etym.* 1.29.1–3 (cf. above, p. 40f.). Adding to the material borrowed from Tertullian, Isidore makes it plain that it was in the primeval language—which he explicitly identifies as Hebrew (Sect. 2.2, p. 84f.)—that Adam gave names to the living beings. Even more interestingly, Isidore explicitly identifies a second stage of (multiple) naming at some point subsequent to the events of Babel (Sect. 3.3, p. 114f.), when 'the different nations also gave names (*dederunt uocabula*) to each of the animals in their own languages (*ex propria lingua*)'. It seems justified to state that Isidore follows Augustine's later account of language origin (cf. above, p. 36) in expressly crediting Adam with the first act of naming on the sixth day of Creation, while he is more explicit than Augustine in drawing a distinction between the first, 'adamic' act of naming, and the later multiple acts of naming in the different post-Babylonian languages.

Several smaller clues for Isidore's views on the origin and nature of language can be gathered from heterogeneous contexts throughout the *Etymologiae*. One case relating to the nature of naming can be found at 3.3.2, where Isidore deals with the names given to numbers. He notes that the number *quinque* received its name

not according to nature (*non secundum naturam*), but according to the arbitrary will (*secundum placitum uoluntatis*) of the person who bestowed the names upon numbers (*ab eo, qui numeris nomina indidit*).

Furthermore, a limited number of passages where Isidore refers to ‘primary’ words can—with the necessary caution—be connected to the second, post-Babelic stage of naming implied in *Etym.* 12.1.1. The notion of primary words should presumably be traced back to Plato’s *πρώτα ὄνόματα*, with an important intermediary stage in the work of Varro, who in *De lingua Latina* 6.5.36–37 and 8.2.5 makes a distinction between *primigenia uerba* and *declinata uerba*, the latter being gradually derived from the former according to the specific historical circumstances (Collart 1954: 269–270; 1978b: 16). Two relevant cases can be found in the *Etymologiae*, but it should be repeated that these references ought to be interpreted with caution, due to Isidore’s fragmentary reliance on a very specific ‘grammatical’ tradition. Dealing at 1.7.7 with the noun as one of the parts of speech, Isidore distinguishes a separate class of *nomina principalia*, such as *mons* or *fons*. He states that these nouns are called *principalia* ‘because they hold a primary position (*primam positionem*) and are not derived from another word (*nec aliunde nascuntur*)’. At 1.8.5 Isidore divides the class of pronouns into two categories, namely primary (*primogenia*) and derived (*deductiua*) pronouns. He further specifies that ‘primary’ pronouns are so called because they ‘do not take their origin from elsewhere’ (*aliunde originem non trahunt*). Although Isidore is not dealing here with language origin but with a grammatical distinction between two classes of nouns, these passages suggest that in his opinion, some words are more ‘original’ than others. When we connect the information provided in these passages to the passages discussed above—a connection which Isidore did not necessarily make himself—these ‘original’ words would thus be closer to the names imposed in the individual newly arisen languages during the second, post-Babelic stage of naming.

2 God’s Providence and the Distinctly Human Capacity of Speech

As has already become clear in the above, it was emphasized over and again from Aristotle onwards (e.g. *Politica* 1.1.1253a) that the capacity of speech and/or language together with rational thinking ($\lambdaόγος$) is uniquely human and as such a crucial criterion in distinguishing humans from animals (Gera 2003: 36 with n. 69, 182; Verlinsky 2005: 59; Fögen 2007). Whereas this distinction was already given a teleological dimension by Aristotle, who notes in *Politica*

1.1.1253a that ‘nature does nothing in vain’ (οὐθὲν γάρ … μάτην ἡ φύσις ποιεῖ) (Gera 2003: 37), it appears that this teleological dimension was importantly added to within a Christian, biblical framework, in the light of ‘divine economy’ or God’s providence more specifically. The assumption seems to be that if humans are distinguished from animals by their capacity of speech/language, this is so in accordance with God’s providence rather than being mere coincidence.¹⁸ Thus, Minucius Felix argues in the apologetic context of *Octauius* 17.2 that unlike animals, ‘we’—humans—are ‘endowed with uplifted countenance (*uultus erectus*) and gaze directed towards heaven (*spectus in caelum*), gifted with speech and reason (*sermo et ratio*), enabling us to recognize, perceive and imitate God (*per quae Deum agnoscimus sentimus imitamur*)’. In the relevant source material, the capacity of language is frequently connected to forms of cognitive processing proper to humans, and to the anatomical infrastructure which makes the production of speech possible. A remarkable feature of this ‘providential’ view on the human capacity of language and speech is the use of words suggesting the fixed functionality of the different organs involved in the production of speech, such as e.g. *officium*.

Lactantius: Speech as a Product of God’s ‘Expert Craftsmanship’

This ‘providential’ view is prominent in the works of Lactantius, who in *Divinae institutiones* 6.21.6 designates God as ‘the maker of mind, voice and tongue alike’ (*et mentis et uocis et linguae artifex*; cf. Colot 2001: 702–703). An illustrative example can be found in the apologist’s *De opificio Dei*, which is, in McHugh’s words (1999a: 489), ‘a vindication of God’s providence based on the structure and organization of the human body’. Lactantius argues at 10.12–15 that the mouth serves both for eating and for speaking (cf. above, p. 28), and specifies that it encloses the tongue, which ‘by its movements discerns the voice into words’. He emphasizes, however, that the tongue alone cannot perform the function of talking, but that it must be assisted by palate, teeth, and lips. Furthermore, at 11.9–11, Lactantius argues with remarkable detail that thanks to God’s ‘expert craftsmanship’ (*diuina sollertia*), the windpipe opens both to the nostrils and to the mouth, because humans would not be able to speak if the windpipe would open only to the nostrils just as the throat opens only to the mouth. Thanks to this arrangement of God’s providence, Lactantius concludes, the tongue is able to perform its service (*ministerio suo fungi*), in

18 This notion is also present in *Aduersus nationes* 1.33 by Arnobius the Elder, who argues that if animals ‘could be released into the faculty of our languages (*in linguarum nostrarum facilitatem*)’ and if inanimate objects likewise would be able to speak, animals as well as objects would naturally understand, and even ‘shout out’ the existence of the one God.

that it ‘cuts, by its movements, the unhampered course of the voice into words’. The functional, purposeful interaction of the speech organs and the exclusively human capacity of speech are thus used as a capital argument in demonstrating God’s providence.

Lactantius thematizes the exclusivity of speech and language to humans explicitly in *De ira Dei*, a treatise directed against the Epicureans and the Stoics (McHugh 1999a: 489). He argues at 14.2 that man alone is able to ‘understand’ God and thus to fully appreciate His greatness, since it is man alone who ‘possesses senses and is capable of reason’ (*sentiens capaxque rationis*). He states furthermore that ‘man alone (*solus*) received speech and language / a tongue (*sermonem ... ac linguam*) as an interpreter of thought (*cogitationis interpretem*)’, in order to be able to proclaim God (cf. Colot 2001: 708). Human language is thus closely connected to advanced cognitive capacities (cf. the intertwined meanings of $\lambda\delta\gamma\sigma$), and presented as a precondition for the active worship of God.¹⁹ The latter point is made more explicitly in *Diuinae institutiones* 4.26.8, where Lactantius states that only when it pronounces the ‘strength and majesty of the one God’, the tongue ‘fulfills its natural function’ (*officio naturae suae fungitur*; cf. Colot 2001: 707)—a statement diametrically opposed to the ‘naturalistic’ notion that the tongue serves primarily for eating. It is worth pointing out that Lactantius designates language (or the tongue) as ‘interpreter of thought’, *cogitationis interpres* in *De ira Dei* 14.2, and as *interpres animi* in *Diuinae institutiones* 6.18.6—the latter being a quotation from Lucretius (6.1149).²⁰ In *Diuinae institutiones* 4.29.6 Lactantius calls the tongue *sermonis ministra*, a phrase which in my opinion again implies a notion of functionality.

Ambrose, Jerome, Augustine

The interconnections between God’s providence and the distinctly human capacity of speech are also explored by Ambrose, Jerome, and Augustine, though less extensively and less systematically than is the case in Lactantius. Ambrose in *Exameron* 6.9.68 argues that ‘only we humans’ (*soli homines*) give expression to ‘what we perceive with our heart’ (*quae corde sentimus*) and that we thus ‘indicate (*signamus*) the thoughts of our silent mind (*cognitiones tac-*

19 Cf. Gera’s section on ‘Religion and Protolanguage’ (2003: 128–132 [128]): ‘The assumption that religious feelings precede language certainly features in later European thought. Indeed, sentiments related to the divine were sometimes seen as the very impetus to language.’

20 The phrase *interpres animi* is also used for the tongue in *De opificio Dei* 10.13 (Gatzemeier 2013: 299 n. 351; cf. Ennodius, *Ep. 3.11.3: interpres animorum lingua*).

itae mentis'). Language is thus the verbal representation of cognitive processes and mental (emotional) perceptions characteristic of humans. Jerome states in *Commentarius in Ecclesiasten* 3.18/21 (CCSL 72: 281) that 'we express our will in language' (*nos uoluntatem sermone proferimus*), while animals remain dumb. But in line with the Bible verse he is commenting on, Jerome stresses that 'though we differ from beasts only in language (*tantum sermone differamus a bestiis*)', we are just as vulnerable and mortal as they are.

Augustine in *De ciuitate Dei* 7.14 concisely refers to 'the care of our speech (*curam nostri sermonis*)', by reason of which we excel beasts (*quo pecoribus antecellimus*)' (Burton 2007: 19). Again at 22.24.4 he states that unlike animals—with which humans have their mortality in common—humans were created with reason, with an erect bodily form which makes religion possible, and with a 'wonderful mobility' (*mira mobilitas*) of tongue and hands, which enables humans to speak and to write. When contrasting human words to the Word of God in *De trinitate* 15.11.20, Augustine describes the human word as that 'of a rational animate being' (*uerbum rationalis animantis*). In *Ep. 102.10* he refers to language as a means by which humans 'may share with one another their ideas' (*inter se sua sensa communicent*). Likewise, in *De sermone Domini in monte* 1.6.17, Augustine mentions the voice and the tongue among other bodily functions (*officia corporalia*) or motions (*corporis motus*), thus indicating the functionality of the organs involved in the production of speech.

After Augustine

More dispersed, though still rather explicit echoes of the theme can be found in authors active during the period following upon Augustine. Cassiodorus argues in *De anima* 11 (CCSL 96: 556) that the human tongue was given with the purpose of regulating (*ad ... temperandum*) our utterances into articulated words, and thus to 'distinguish us from the disorder of animals' (*nos ... ab animalium confusione distinguerent*). This statement implies that the human tongue is in itself more sophisticated (to the degree that it is capable of producing speech) than the tongue of 'lower' animals. The 'disorder' or 'confusion' of animals to which Cassiodorus refers might be interpreted with specific reference to their undistinguished and meaningless sounds or, more broadly, to the lacking or unsystematic association among animals which is concomitant to their alleged lack of an elaborate communication system (cf. e.g. Fögen 2007). In the Latin tradition, the former alternative is conceived of in terms of *uox articulata* versus *uox confusa* (Varro; cf. Augustine, *Contra aduersarium legis et prophetarum* 1.8.11), an opposition which goes back, again, to Aristotle (Collart 1954: 63). The purposeful functionality of the tongue in the production of speech is also suggested when Cassiodorus in *Expositio Psalmorum* 118.131 uses the phrase *lin-*

guae mobilitas adhibetur and when John Cassian in *Collationes* 7.26.4 refers to the different *officia* (services, functions) of the respective parts of the body, among which he mentions the ‘motion of the tongue, by which the utterance of the voice is expressed (*quo elocutio uocis exprimitur*)’. A similar account was given some centuries before by Hilary of Poitiers, who states in *Tractatus super Psalmos* 51.7 that the function of the human tongue (*linguae humanae officium*) is ‘to distinguish the voice into words by varying and moderating its motion’.

As has been indicated above, Boethius in his commentary on Aristotle’s *Categoriae* writes (PL 64: 159A–C) that only humans are able to impose names on things. Isidore in *Etym.* 12.1.5 integrates the grammarian Servius’ definition (commentary on Vergil’s *Aeneid* 1.435) of *pecus*, ‘cattle’, as ‘any animal that lacks (*caret*) human language (*humana lingua*) and form’. At 1.9.1 he draws on Augustine’s semiotic doctrine when defining *uerba* as ‘signs of the mind’ (*mentis signa*), and specifying that by way of these, ‘people (*homines*) show their thoughts to one another (*cogitationes suas inuicem ... demonstrant*) in speaking (*loquendo*)’.²¹ Isidore does not thematize the exclusivity of language to humans, but this passage clearly illustrates the notion that language and (advanced) cognition are distinctly human capacities.

3 The Anatomy of Speech as a ‘Musical Instrument’ or a ‘Building’

Early Christian Latin authors show a remarkable interest in the anatomical ‘infrastructure’ or ‘gear’ which makes human speech possible. This might connect to the notion that God willingly created humans as beings capable of speech, a notion which has been discussed extensively in the previous section. In addition, the metonymical use of *lingua*, ‘tongue’, for ‘language’ might have stimulated the reflection on the anatomy of speech among Latin authors in general—although this is certainly not to say that they would not have reflected on the issue otherwise.²² In spite of the recurrence of the theme of the anatomy of speech in the source texts, scholarly literature on it appears to be rather scant. Biville (2001) discusses the theme of anatomy and physiology of speech in Latin texts, but apart from Isidore she does not deal with Christian authors.

²¹ Fontaine (1959: 49 n. 2) designates this definition as a summary (‘résumé’) of Augustine’s exposition in *De ordine* 2.12.35 (Sect. 1.1, p. 34f.), whereas he singles out the phrase *mentis signa* as a reminiscence of *De trinitate* 15.11.20: *Proinde uerbum quod foris sonat signum est uerbi quod intus lucet cui magis uerbi competit nomen*.

²² This metonymical relationship is repeatedly commented on or rhetorically exploited by early Christian Latin authors; cf. Augustine, *De libero arbitrio* 3.19, *De Genesi ad litteram libri duodecim* 12.8.19; Isidore, *Etym.* 7.2.19, *Sententiae* 1.5.9.

Discussions of the anatomy of speech in early Christian Latin literature can be categorized according to the terminology and imagery used. ‘Technical’ or ‘medical’ descriptions aside (cf. e.g. Boethius in the preface to his commentary on Aristotle’s *De interpretatione* 1.2 [Meiser 1880: 4]; Isidore, *Etymologiae* 11.1.49–51), it is possible to distinguish comments where imagery from the domain of musical instruments, and comments where imagery from the domain of architecture is used. It is on these passages that I will focus in what follows, exactly because the imagery used might tell us something more about Christian appraisals of the capacity of speech. The imagery of musical instruments is very popular in early Christian Latin authors’ descriptions of the anatomy of speech. This certainly goes back to a tradition already evidenced in Cicero’s *De natura deorum* 2.149, which has it that ‘our philosophers are used to compare the tongue to a plectrum, and the teeth to strings’. Cicero’s statement indicates that there was already an established tradition of comparing the speech organs to (parts of) musical instruments prior to him. Furthermore, Jerome’s translation of Didymus of Alexandria’s *Liber de spiritu sancto* 35 shows that the imagery was also current among early Christian Greek authors.²³

In Christian Latin literature, the author of the pseudo-Clementine *Recognitiones* (in Rufinus’ translation) at 8.29.3–4 praises the functionality of the parts of the human body as it was shaped by the divine *artifex*. In doing so, he refers to the ears, which were shaped as cymbals in order to amplify the ‘reverberated sound of the received word’ and thus to transmit it to the heart. The author subsequently mentions the tongue, which is shaped in such a way ‘that it performs the task of a plectrum (*plectri reddit officium*) for speaking, by being beaten against the teeth (*illisa dentibus*)’. A very similar description occurs in Jerome’s *Ep.* 108.24.1. Jerome there refers to tongue, palate and teeth as parts of the anatomical infrastructure for speech, and continues—in a passage which will be integrated by Isidore, *Etym.* 11.1.51—by comparing the human voice to a musical instrument. He writes that ‘just as the plectrum strikes upon strings (*sicut enim plectrum cordis*), so also the tongue strikes against the teeth (*ita lingua illiditur dentibus*) and makes a vocal sound’.

The poet Prudentius, too, calls upon the imagery of musical instruments. In *Liber Peristephanon* 10.2 he designates his own mouth as an *organum*, and at 10.6 he refers to the martyr Romanus’ tongue (cf. above, p. 33) as *plectrum*

²³ The passage concerned reads as follows: *Nos quippe homines quando de aliqua re ad alterum loquimur, primum quod uolumus, mente concipimus absque sermone. Inde in alterius sensum uolentes transferre, linguae organum commouemus, et quasi quoddam plectrum chordis dentium collidentes, uocalem sonum emitimus.*

palati. In 10.926–945 Prudentius has Romanus give a very detailed exposition of the anatomy of speech, and further elaborate on the imagery of musical instruments. The speech organs mentioned are lungs, windpipe, mouth, palate, teeth and lips, and the association of these speech organs with musical instruments is very prominent. Relevant images are the tortoise-shell (*testudo*)—commonly denoting the lyre—for the mouth, the comb (*pecten*) for the teeth, the plectrum (*plectrum mobile*) for the tongue, the pipes (*fistulae*) for the windpipe, and the cymbals (*cymbala*) for the lips. In addition, the imagery of the musical instrument is hinted at by the use of verb forms such as *repercussos* (*repercutere*, ‘to reverberate, to resound’), *temperetur* (*tempero[r]*, ‘to arrange, to compound properly’), *agendis* (*agere*, ‘to play, to conduct’) and *concinentes* (*concinere*, ‘to sound together, to harmonize’), as well as by the adjective form *consono* (*consonus*, ‘sounding together in harmony’). Augustine in *Sermo* 65.6 compares the tongue to a musical instrument (*organum*) and the soul to an inner *musicus* who plays it.

Fulgentius the mythographer in *Mitologiae* 1.15.46 argues that the pagans add Apollo as number ten to the nine Muses, ‘because there are ten organs of articulation (*modulamina*) for the human voice’. He further elaborates on the imagery of musical instruments when giving a detailed account of how speech is produced. In doing so, he mentions the four front teeth against which the tongue strikes, the two lips like cymbals which modulate the words, the tongue like a plectrum which shapes the air, and the palate which projects the sound with its cavity. The same imagery is used by Claudianus Mamertus, who in his description of the production of speech in *De statu animae* 3.9 refers to the ‘organ of the breast’ (*organum pectoris*), the ‘pipe of the throat’ (*tibia gutturis*), the ‘cavity of the mouth’ (*oris cauum*) and the ‘plectrum of the tongue’ (*linguae plectrum*). The commonplace designation of the tongue as a plectrum also occurs in Cassiodorus’ *De anima* 11 (CCSL 96: 556) and in Paulinus of Petricordia’s *De uita sancti Martini* 4.283.

The architectural imagery is noticeably less customary than the musical instrument imagery, but nevertheless occurs a couple of times in descriptions of the anatomy of speech. It can be identified in Ambrose’s *Exameron* 6.9.68, where the author when surveying the anatomy of man—created by God on the sixth day—applaudingly speaks of the human mouth in terms of ‘sanctuary (*adytum*) of speech’, ‘fountain (*fons*) of arguments’, ‘hall (*aula*) of words’, and ‘repository (*promptuarium*) of will’. Likewise, Avitus of Vienne in *Poemata* 1.87–88 combines the architectural image of ‘vault, arch’ (*camera*) for the palate to the commonplace ‘plectrum’ for the tongue, and Venantius Fortunatus in *Vita sancti Marcelli* 8.32 (MGH AA 4/2: 52) refers to the ‘roof of the palate’ (*palati camera*) and the ‘fence of the teeth’ (*sepes dentium*).

Of course, literary imagery is to a large extent conventional and as such has only limited evidential value with regard to linguistic ideas. In addition, it has been shown above that the musical instrument imagery had an ancient pedigree in pagan philosophical writings. Nevertheless, the importance of these two types of imagery in Christian comments on the issue in my opinion lies in the fact that both musical instruments and buildings are functional entities. Their parts connect to each other in a useful way, and mutually ('harmoniously') contribute to the achievement of a fixed and shared purpose, respectively the production of agreeable sound and the provision of a comfortable place to live. Although it is impossible to verify a causal connection, it seems justified to suggest that the imageries of musical instruments and architecture lend themselves especially well for the description of the anatomy of speech in a context where the human production of speech is a crucial part of the providential scheme designed by a divine *artifex* (cf. above, p. 45).

4 The Transitory and Narrow Character of Human Language

Whereas the findings of the two previous sections suggest an 'optimistic' appraisal of the human capacity of speech and language within a Christian world-view, Christian authors also had serious reservations about the possibilities of human language. Early Christian Latin authors frequently comment on the futility of human language and speech as a whole, by contrast to thought and reality (cf. already Plato), but most importantly as opposed to God, who in their opinion cannot be fathomed or adequately expressed in human language. This point of view is of course not exclusive to the Latin Christian tradition. A representative voice on the issue in early Greek Christianity is Gregory of Nyssa, who makes the following statement in *Contra Eunomium* 2.145:

Since no one title has been discovered to embrace the divine Nature (ἐν οὐδὲν ὄνομα περιληπτικὸν τῆς θείας ἔξεύρηται φύσεως) by applying directly to the subject itself, we therefore use many titles (πολλοῖς ὀνόμασι), each person in accordance with various interests achieving some particular idea about him, to name the Divinity, as we hunt amid the pluriform variety of terms applying to him (ἐκ τῆς πολυειδοῦς καὶ ποικίλης κατ' αὐτοῦ σημασίας) for sparks to light up our understanding of the object of our quest.

The point of Gregory's statements is that God's nature is so infinitely rich and variegated that it cannot be designated adequately by a single word or name.

While this issue is elaborated upon in early Christian literature in many different ways, two prominent aspects of this notion of futility are the ‘transitory character’ of human speech, and the ‘narrowness’ of human language and words. With reference to early Christian Latin authors, I will focus on these two aspects.

Transitory Character

The transitory character of human speech is often contrasted with the relative durability of written language and—sometimes relatedly—to the absolute permanence of (the Word of) God. Lactantius states in *Divinae institutiones* 4.8.11 that while ‘our voices (*nostrae uoces*) may well be carried off on the breeze and disappear (*aurae misceantur atque uanescant*)’, they do survive to a considerable extent when put to writing (Sect. 10.1, p. 343f.). Elaborating on this, he argues that the relative durability of written language is ‘all the more reason to trust that God’s Word abides for ever’ (1 Petr. 1:25). Likewise, Hilary of Poitiers argues in *De trinitate* 2.15 that whereas the Word of God is a ‘reality’ instead of a sound, a ‘nature’ instead of a word, and ‘God’ instead of idleness, in the case of human words, to the contrary, ‘there is an end’ (*cessat*) to the utterance of a voice. Augustine—in a way strongly reminiscent of Lactantius—comments in *De doctrina Christiana* 2.4.5 (cf. *De fide et symbolo* 3.3) that letters were invented to form signs of words (Sect. 10.1, p. 345),

because words immediately pass away (*statim transeunt*) once they have agitated the air waves (*uerberato aere*) and last no longer than they resound (*nec diutius manent quam sonant*).

It is interesting to see how Augustine puns on the traditional Stoic etymology of *uerbum ex uerberato aere* (cf. Fontaine 1959: 105). In *In Iohannis euangelium tractatus* 1.8 Augustine contrasts the transience of external words to the permanence of the internal *uerbum*—the ‘word of the heart’—and to the *uerbum* that was in the beginning with God.²⁴ Unlike the Word of God, he argues, the words pronounced by people are bound to ‘sound and cease’ (*sonuerunt atque transierunt* and *sonuit et transiit*). At 20.10 in the same work (cf. *Contra Secundinum* 15 [CSEL 25: 928]) he contrasts the permanence of thought to the transience of speech by asking the rhetorical question: ‘You do not chase after

²⁴ For a lexicographical study of *uerbum* as a (less than perfectly adequate) rendering and continuation of the Greek λόγος (and Λόγος from the Gospel of John), cf. Roesch (2006).

syllables (*numquid sequeris syllabas*) and make them stay put, do you (*et facis ut maneant*)?

Gregory the Great explains in *Homiliae in euangelia* 1.1.4 that the prophetic words that ‘heaven and earth will pass by, but my words will not’ (Luc. 21:33, Marc. 13:31) ought to be read as an inversion of the normal state of affairs. He argues that while there is nothing as durable among corporeal things as heaven and earth, nothing in nature passes by as fast as speech (*nihil in rerum natura tam uelociter quam sermo transit*). He further elaborates on this in what could be termed an ‘aporia of human speech’, writing that

words are no words as long as they are not completed (*uerba enim quousque imperfecta sunt, uerba non sunt*); but once they are completed, they are not there at all, because they cannot be completed but by passing by (*quia nec perfici nisi transeundo possunt*).

Peter Chrysologus in *Sermo* 72.1 refers to human speech as one of the principal aspects of the futility of man. Apart from the mortal heart, the feeble mind, and the narrowness of human perception, he mentions ‘the breeze of the human voice’ (*humanae uocis aura*) and ‘the human tongue which is soon to become silent’ (*humana lingua cito tacitura*). Boethius argues in book 2 of his commentary on Aristotle’s *Categoriae* (PL 64: 208B) that speech passes away as soon as it is uttered and that ‘there is no way that it will be able to last’ (*nec ulla ratione poterit permanere*). These instances show that early Christian Latin authors generally conceive of speech as something fleeting, especially when contrasted to the durability of God’s ‘Word’.

Narrowness

The second aspect of the futility of human language as opposed to reality, religion, and God, is its alleged ‘narrowness’. With regard to God, Novatian argues in *De trinitate* 2.13.5–6 (cf. 7.3) that His greatness is inconceivable, and that

He is also greater than all speech (*maior est quoque omni sermone*) and He cannot be expressed (*nec edici possit*); for if He could be expressed (*ne si potuerit edici*), He would be less than human speech (*humano sermone minor sit*), which through expressing Him would then comprehend and contain Him (*quo cum edicitur et circumiri et colligi possit*). Whatever can be thought about Him is less than He (*quicquid enim de illo cogitatum fuerit, minus ipso erit*); whatever can be uttered about Him will be less than He when compared with Him (*et quicquid enuntiatum fuerit, minus illo*

*comparatum circum ipsum erit). When we are silent, we can experience Him to some extent (*sentire enim illum taciti aliquatenus possumus*), but we cannot express Him in words as He really is (*ut autem ipse est, sermone explicare non possumus*).*

Apart from this clear instance, minor variations occur in different contexts. When in *De fide* 2.9.75 criticizing the verbal hairsplitting allegedly giving rise to the Arian stretch of Christianity, Ambrose tells his reader not to look ‘at the narrowness of human speech (*humani sermonis angustias*), but at the love contained in words (*uerborum caritatem*)’ (cf. Bartelink 1979b: 181–182). John Cassian in *Collationes* 9.25 deals with a superior, ‘ineffable’ form of prayer, which ‘transcends every human sense’ and which is entirely disconnected from the human voice and tongue. When the soul prays in this superior way, John Cassian argues, ‘it does not avail itself of the narrow words of human language (*humanis atque angustis ... eloquiis*)’. In order to preclude the dangerous inference that the three persons of Trinity would be three separate gods occupying different hierarchical ranks, it is argued in the collection of homilies attributed to the so-called Eusebius ‘Gallicanus’ (10.10) that human speech is bound to use three separate names because the nature of Trinity is too complicated for the confines of human speech (*humani sermonis paupertate*).

Likewise, Fulgentius of Ruspe in *Ep.* 14.7 refers to the ‘poverty of human language’ (*humani sermonis inopia*) in relation to the difficulty of naming and understanding Trinity. Isidore asks in *Sententiae* 1.2.4 (cf. *Sent.* 1.15.6; *Etym.* 7.1.31–32) how it is possible that God, who has not been created (*qui non est factus*) is nevertheless called *perfectus*, and subsequently replies that it is ‘human indigence’ (*humana inopia*) which ‘adopted this word from our usage (*de usu nostro sumit*)’, in order to utter something that is actually ineffable, ‘since human speech (*humanus sermo*) cannot say anything about God in a worthy manner’ (cf. Fontaine 1959: 42). Although the narrowness of human language is again primarily a commonplace in Christian literature, it is tempting to read the formulas used as Christian appropriations of the existing commonplace of *Spracharmut* in Latin literature, most famously in Lucretius (Müller-Wetzel 2000, Fögen 2000). On this reading, terms such as *angustiae* (*angustus*), *paupertas*, and *inopia* would have been adopted from lexico-semantic comparisons in the context of translation (Sect. 7.4, p. 247f.), and transferred to a context where human language perceivedly lacks the means of expressing the ‘greatness of God’. The ‘abundance’ of God’s essence would then agree to that of the source language, whereas the ‘poverty’ of human language would correspond to that of the target language in the process of translation.

Summary

This chapter aimed to explore early Christian Latin authors' views on the origin and nature of human language and/or speech. The first section—dealing with language origin specifically—can be regarded as the main part of this chapter, while the three remaining sections served to explore the further ramifications of the first section, with specific regard to the nature of language.

It is only relatively seldom that early Christian Latin authors explicitly and directly comment on the topic of language origin. While they seem to agree that both the capacity of speech and human language itself are given or inspired by God—a view for which there is in fact no alternative within a Christian framework—their detailed discussions of language origin show a high degree of diversity, due to the strong interaction—both in terms of agreement and polemic—with pagan authorities on the matter. Lactantius indirectly indicates his opinion on the origins of human language and society when rebutting the pagan view that these entities developed on haphazard. He reproduces a pagan, naturalistic (Epicurean?) theory on the issue and criticizes it, while arguing himself that God deliberately (in accordance with His providence) made man a 'social animal', which by its very nature needed a sophisticated means of communication. Augustine likewise emphasizes the gradual, societal character of language origin in *De ordine*, an early dialogue which is strongly influenced by pagan philosophy (Cicero), but in *De Genesi ad litteram libri duodecim* 9.12.20 he explicitly singles out Adam as the original namegiver. Although a reconciliation of both accounts seems difficult at first sight, I have argued that both perspectives do not necessarily exclude each other.

The issue of language origin is also indirectly dealt with by Boethius, who in the preface to his commentary on Aristotle's *Categoriae* develops the distinction between *nomina rerum* and *nomina nominum* and thus defines the scope of his commentary (viz. to *nomina rerum*). In developing this distinction, however, Boethius gives an interesting account of how the human race in a first stage imposed words on external objects, and in a second movement gave names to types of words. This is presented as a gradual process, but Boethius also refers to a (further unspecified) first namegiver. Given Boethius' educational background and the 'governing text' for his commentary, his account is heavily influenced by Aristotle and the Neoplatonic commentary tradition. Lastly, Isidore extensively discusses language origin in direct connection to the methodological principles of his etymological encyclopaedia, since through the mechanism of etymology he aims to go back to the original form of words and, thus, to the essence of the things they denote. Interestingly, Isidore is the only author covered by this study explicitly to connect the Christian to the

(pagan) philosophical perspective. He starts from the traditional distinction between nature and convention, but presents Adam as the original namegiver. Due to the notion that Adam was divinely authorized when giving names, there is arguably a closer connection between ‘nature’ and convention.

By contrast to the authors’ diverse opinions with regard to language origin, their statements on the nature of language appear to be rather homogeneous. However, even these commonplace statements turn out to be valuable sources for the authors’ attitudes towards the issue. In the second section of this chapter, it has been shown that early Christian Latin authors frequently thematize the capacity of speech as a crucial criterion in distinguishing humans from animals. It has been argued more specifically that the authors connect this notion to their views on divine providence. When humans are able—by contrast to animals—to express their thoughts and emotions in the form of structured and meaningful utterances, this is no coincidence but willed by God. Within this framework, the authors often elaborate on advanced forms of cognitive processing and speech organs exclusive to humans, and on the functionality and teleology of all this.

Narrowly connected to this question is the subject matter of the third section, which was concerned with the terminology and imagery which early Christian Latin authors use when discussing the anatomy of speech. It has been shown that—‘technical’ or ‘medical’ descriptions aside—there is a remarkable tendency among the authors to use imagery from the domains of musical instruments and architecture. That is to say, they describe speech organs in terms of parts of musical instruments and of buildings. Although these are literary commonplaces and although the musical instrument imagery was certainly inherited from the classical tradition, it has been cautiously suggested that this tendency might relate to the findings of the second section, namely the functional and teleological character of human language as planned by divine providence. The concerted ‘purposefulness’ of the parts of a building or a musical instrument corresponds well to these notions.

Whereas the above observations suggest a certain optimism in early Christian Latin authors’ appraisals of the human capacity of speech and language, the authors were rather pessimistic in that they regarded human language and speech as ‘futile’ entities. This provided the subject matter for the fourth and final section. It has been shown that when commenting on the ‘futility’ of human language and speech when compared to reality, thought, and—most importantly—God, the authors focus either on the transience of human speech or on the narrowness of human language. As to the latter notion, it has been suggested that this could be read as a typically Christian appropriation of the *Spracharmut* commonplace originating in the context of translation.

The Primeval Situation

Having discussed early Christian Latin authors' views on the origin and nature of language, I will now proceed to their opinions on the 'primeval situation' in language history. By the term 'primeval situation', I refer to the period in language history beginning with Creation and lasting until the origin of linguistic diversity—commonly identified as the construction of the tower of Babel—which will be discussed extensively in Chapter 3. In scholarly literature on the topic, little is contributed by Díaz Esteban (1982), but much of the relevant source material for this chapter and for Chapter 3 has been discussed by Borst (1958) and, more recently, by Eskhult (2013, 2014). While these are wide-ranging and very useful discussions, I will try to improve our understanding of early Christian Latin authors' views on the issue in a systematic and comparative way, and by paying due attention to the dynamics of innovation and canonization in connection with intellectual authority (cf. Introduction).

Biblical comments on the 'primeval situation' in language history are relatively scant, and all of them are confined to the book of Genesis. Apart from the implicit evidence from some cases of wordplay in the biblical text which only 'work' in Hebrew (Gera 2003: 31), it can be stated with Resnick (1990: 55) that 'Scripture says nothing definitive ... about the identity of a primitive language' (cf. Albertz 1989: 1–3; Eskhult 2014: 298). It can only be inferred from Gen. 11:1, 6–7, and 9 that there was a single language for entire mankind until it was split up during the events of Babel.¹ In this chapter, I will use the term 'minimal view' in order to refer to this rather vague account provided by the biblical text, which is sometimes followed by the authors without further differentiation. In order to gauge the specificity and, thus, the 'innovativeness' of the authors' discussions of the issue, I will investigate (1) which authors stick to this 'minimal view'; (2) when they do not, how the authors conceive of the identity of the primeval language, and of the relationship between the primeval language and

¹ In the English Standard Version, the relevant Bible passages respectively read as follows: 'Now the whole earth had one language and the same words'—'And the Lord said: 'Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language, and this is only the beginning of what they will do. And nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. Come, let us go down and there confuse their language, so that they may not understand one another's speech'—'Therefore its name was called Babel, because there the Lord confused the language of all the earth. And from there the Lord dispersed them over the face of all the earth'.

(post-Babelic) Hebrew; and (3) whether the primeval language is also explicitly identified as the language used (a) by Adam and (b) by God. As to the latter issue, I will also investigate which alternatives are proposed by those authors who do not identify the ‘language of God’ with the primeval language.

1 The ‘Minimal View’

Either explicitly or implicitly, all authors belonging to the text corpus subscribe to the minimal view that before the events of Babel, mankind belonged to one nation and accordingly availed itself of a single primeval language. This may seem almost a triviality, but it is noteworthy that all authors stick to a ‘monogenetic’ view on language origin—the belief that there was only one language originally—whereas the ‘polygenetic’ opinion is also evidenced in sources from (pagan) antiquity. An example of the latter position is Diodorus Siculus, who argues in *Bibliotheca historica* 1.8.4 that since groups of people arose simultaneously in different parts of the world, ‘not all men had the same language (οὐχ ὁμόφωνον πάντας ἔχειν τὴν διάλεκτον), inasmuch as every group organized the elements of its speech by mere chance (έκάστων ως ἔτυχε συντοξάντων τὰς λέξεις)’ (Gera 2003: 163–164, 172). The fact that early Christian Latin authors restrict themselves to a monogenetic position is certainly to be explained with reference to the authority of the biblical account. We will also see, however, that all authors hold a polygenetic view of the ‘second start’ in language history, i.e. the differentiation of languages which is part of the events taking place at Babel (Sect. 3.3, p. 107f.).

Not only do all early Christian Latin authors accept the ‘minimal view’ of the primeval situation in language history, some of them also *confine* themselves to it. Commodian, possibly the first Christian poet of the Latin West, in *Carmen apologeticum aduersus Iudeos et gentes* 167 limits himself to the statement that God saw the construction of the tower of Babel happening ‘under one language’ (*sub una loquelle*). The same solution is adopted by Hilary of Poitiers, who in *Tractatus super Psalmos* 136.5 briefly touches on the primeval situation in language history. In a parenthesis dealing with the etymology of *Babylon*, he argues that linguistic diversity arose at Babel, whereas until that time ‘there was a single language common to all’ (*cum unus omnium esset sermo*).

Sulpicius Severus writes in *Chronica* 1.4.4 that although men had already spread across the earth, ‘nevertheless all made use of one tongue’ (*una tamen omnes lingua utebantur*), until they gathered again in order to build the tower of Babel (Sect. 3.1, p. 101). Further on, he writes that when God reacts by imped-

ing mutual understanding, men begin to speak in a way that is highly different ‘from their accustomed form of speech’ (*a sueto sermonis genere*). This phrase can be read as a summary reference to men’s former common language, reflecting a ‘minimal view’ of the primeval situation in language history. Borst (1958: 406) has rightly pointed out that Sulpicius Severus does not associate the one primeval language with the Hebrew language. His explanation for this—‘ängstlich vermißt es der Judenfeind, dabei das Hebräische zu erwähnen’—is probably not exaggerated, since according to Weber (1997: 47) ‘eine rein pejorative Charakteristik des jüdischen Volkes als Kollektiv’ prevails in Sulpicius Severus’ *Chronica*. A ‘minimal view’ on the primeval situation of language history can also be found in the *Consultationes Zacchaei et Apollonii*, a fictitious dialogue of apologetic tenor featuring a Christian named Zacchaeus and a pagan philosopher named Apollonius.² The anonymous author—who has been situated in Sulpicius Severus’ circle of friends (Feiertag 2002)—has the Christian Zacchaeus argue at 1.17.9 that human language was diversified at Babel, ‘whereas there had been one language for all up until that time’ (*cum esset adhuc eo tempore unus omnibus sermo*), and furthermore, at 1.17.11, that some time after Babel, people told their countrymen ‘for which reason they had lost the knowledge of their former language’ (*linguae prioris notitiam perdidisset*). Likewise, in an anonymous Pentecost sermon once ascribed to Ambrose,³ the preacher merely says that before the tower was built, ‘there was one language (*prius ... erat una lingua*), in which people could understand each other and communicate the secrets of their own minds to each other’.

Several further occurrences of a minimal view can be found in works dating to the 5th and 6th centuries. Prosper of Aquitaine in *De uocatione omnium gentium* 2.14 (PL 51: 699B) writes that God intervened at Babel by throwing into confusion ‘the one language of those nations (*unam illorum populorum loqueland*) with its meanings commonly known among them (*notis sibi inuicem significationibus*)’. Cyprianus Gallus in his paraphrase of the events of Babel in *Heptateuchos* 1.11.396–397 explains the smooth progress of the construction of the tower by the fact that all spoke the same language:

For in all, their tongue was familiar with the language (*namque penes cunctos sermonis conscientia lingua*) and it spoke common words through the same utterances (*per similes fatus et ciuica uerba locuta est*).

² For a general study of the *Consultationes Zacchaei et Apollonii*, cf. Feiertag (1990).

³ *Sermo* 36, identified as spurious already by the editor of the PL (17: 675B).

Gregory the Great in *Homiliae in euangelia* 2.30.4—while confronting the events of Pentecost to those of Babel (Sect. 6.2, p. 202)—passingly states that the tower-builders ‘lost the community of their single language’ (*communionem unius linguae perdiderunt*) (Borst 1958: 432–433; Dekker 2005: 349). Fulgentius the mythographer in his *De aetatibus mundi et hominis* 3.11 writes that the tower of Babel ‘was inspired by a unity of the entire people and by the sameness of their language (*linguae adunatione*)’. Further on, while formulating moralizing afterthoughts on the Babel narrative, he summarily refers to ‘one united tongue (*una uox*), one spirit, and one united work that mortal man had undertaken’ (Borst 1958: 426). In the cases reviewed until now, the authors’ choice to stick to a minimal view can be understood either as an ‘easy solution’—because they are not really interested in the specifics of language history and thus consider the information provided in the Bible sufficient—or as a ‘safe’ or ‘low profile’ strategy. In the latter case, the authors at issue avoid the ideological implications that might come with a more innovative stance (e.g. a closer association with Judaism by identifying the primeval language as Hebrew), by simply accepting the vague biblical narrative and by remaining silent on the precise identity and usages of the primeval language. Sulpicius Severus is a clear instance of the latter alternative.

2 The Relation between the Primeval Language and Post-Bablic Hebrew

Throughout history, people have been fascinated by the question as to which language was the original one (cf. e.g. Eco 1995). Without doubt, the most famous case is that of the Egyptian king Psammetichus, who according to Herodotus (*Historiae* 2.2) concluded that Phrygian, and not Egyptian, was the original (most primitive) language of mankind, because two children, which on his command had been raised in isolation by a mute goatherd, had first uttered the word *bekos*, Phrygian for ‘bread’ (Resnick 1990: 53; cf. Thomas 2007). As Resnick furthermore points out (1990: 53–54), Tertullian in *Ad nationes* 1.8.2–10 rejects the identification of Phrygian as the original language, while concluding from the experiment that language is grounded in nature (cf. Barnes 1985: 198). I have not been able to identify other early Christian Latin authors who comment on Psammetichus’ experiment.

Resnick (1990: 55) states that ‘while Scripture says nothing definitive ... about the identity of a primitive language, most authors in the early church—Greek and Latin—agree that this primitive language was Hebrew’. In the present section, I will try to differentiate this general statement. Whereas all the authors

belonging to the corpus follow the ‘minimal view’ of the biblical account, and whereas none of them explicitly contradict the view that Hebrew was the primeval language, the explicit identification of the primeval language with post-Babelic Hebrew is far less universal among early Christian Latin authors. The latter, explicit identification originated in Hellenistic-Jewish circles, and was repeatedly made in early Christian Greek literature on the subject (Rubin 1998; Moss 2010; Van Rooy 2013: 27–36; Eskhult 2014). It should be noted that a couple of Greek and Syriac Christian authors argued that Syriac, not Hebrew was the primeval language of mankind.⁴ An unambiguous argument of this tenor is formulated by Theodoret of Cyrrhus (c.393–466), a Christian Greek author with a Syriac background, who argues in *Quaestiones in Octateuchum* 60–61 that Syriac was the primeval language and that Hebrew is a ‘sacral’ language, which is always acquired by (written) instruction and thus occupies a secondary position, despite its relative importance (Rubin 1998: 321–322; Van Rooy 2013: 32–33; Eskhult 2014: 292, 326).⁵

An important issue with regard to the possible identification of the primeval language as ‘Hebrew’ is the question whether the ethno- and glottonym *Hebraeus* derives either from Heber (sometimes Eber) or from Abraham (sometimes

- 4 The fact that there are no early Christian Latin authors who identify the primeval language as a language different from Hebrew has led Rubin (1998: 328) to posit an ‘uninvolved attitude towards the question of the primordial language’ in Western Christianity (with specific reference to Isidore, *Etym.* 12.1.1–2).
- 5 Theodoret’s argument reads as follows: ‘Which is the most ancient language (*ποίᾳ γλώσσα ἀρχαιότερα*)? The names give the clue; Adam, Cain, Abel, and Noah belong to Syriac (*τῆς Σύρων ἦδια γλώττης*). Speakers of Syriac normally refer to red earth as *adamtha*, so Adam means ‘earthly’ or ‘made of dust’; Cain ‘acquisition’, for when he sang God’s praises, Adam said, ‘Thanks to God I have acquired a man’; Abel ‘grief’, since his was the first death ever seen and he was the first to cause his parents pain; and Noah ‘rest’. So what was the origin of Hebrew (*ἢ οὖν ἐβραία πάθεν ἥρξατο?*)? I believe that Hebrew is a sacred tongue (*οἵμαι αὐτὴν ιερὰν εἶναι φωνήν*). As in the pagan temples there were special signs called ‘hieratic’, so, through Moses, the God of the universe imparted this language, which comes, not from nature, but from instruction (*ό τῶν ὅλων Θεός ταύτην ἔδωκε τὴν γλώτταν, διδακτήν οὖσαν, οὐ φυσικήν*). Indeed, other peoples speak the language of the nations in which they have been born, those raised in Italy using that of the Italians, those in Greece that of the Greeks, those in Persia that of the Persians, and those in Egypt that of the Egyptians. Likewise, we observe the children of the Hebrews using initially, not Hebrew, but the language of the people among whom they have been born. Then in their teens they are taught the alphabet of the written language, and, through the written word, gain knowledge of the holy Bible, which is written in Hebrew. I believe blessed David also hints at this in the eighty-first psalm: ‘He heard a language which he did not know’.

Habraham). For a good understanding of this discussion, it is important to know that according to Gen. 10:25, the events of Babel took place during Heber's lifetime, and that Abraham lived several generations after Heber. On a more general level, important figures in the 'succession of fathers' in biblical genealogy are for present purposes Adam, Noah, Heber, Abraham, and Jacob (generations are skipped between each of these figures).

The opposition Heber vs. Abraham carries on two competing Jewish traditions which ultimately go back to the biblical text. Whereas the Heber eponymy is grounded in Gen. 10:21, 24–25, an argument in favour of the Abraham eponymy can be found in the reference to *Abram Hebraeo* in Gen. 14:13 (but only in the Vulgate version; cf. below, pp. 68 and 76) (Hilhorst 2007: 781). In the tradition spanning between the Bible and early Christian Latin literature, Abraham's role in (language) history is thematized most importantly in the apocryphal book of Jubilees (Albertz 1989: 3; Sherman 2013: 97–120), which was originally written in Hebrew, around the middle of the 2nd century BC. Jubilees is a Hellenistic-Jewish, midrashic 'rewriting' of the books of Genesis and Exodus, up to Ex. 19 (Van Ruiten 2000). The chapters 12:25–27 describe how God blesses Abraham and, through an angel, gives him the capacity of understanding and speaking Hebrew. Hebrew is presented both as the language of Creation and of Revelation (i.e. the language in which God reveals His will to humans), which was lost in the confusion of languages at Babel but is restored to Abraham (cf. Eskhult 2014: 302–303). In VanderKam's translation (1989: 73–74), the author of Jubilees has the mediating angel describe the event as follows:

Then the Lord God said to me: 'Open his mouth and his ears to hear and speak with his tongue in the revealed language'. For from the day of the collapse [of the tower of Babel]⁶ it had disappeared from the mouth(s) of all mankind. I opened his mouth, ears, and lips and began to speak Hebrew with him—in the language of the Creation. He took his fathers' [viz. written by Noah and passed on by his descendants] books (they were written in Hebrew) and copied them.⁷ From that time he began

⁶ The events of Babel are described in Jubilees 10:18–26; cf. the notes by Charles (1902: 82–84) and by VanderKam (1989: 61–63).

⁷ Charles (1902: 96, 134) connects 'his fathers' books' to Jubilees 10:13–14, which reads as follows (tr. VanderKam 1989: 60): 'Noah wrote down in a book everything (just) as we had taught him regarding all the kinds of medicine, and the evil spirits were precluded from pursuing Noah's children. He gave all the books that he had written to his oldest son Sem because he loved him much more than all his sons.' The connection made by Charles shows that 'the

to study them, while I was telling him everything that he was unable (to understand).

This passage in the book of Jubilees will appear to be a crucial source for Ambrosiaster's Abraham-centered model of language history (cf. below, p. 67f.). On the other hand, Dorival (2007: 199–201) argues that several elements from the Heber-centered tradition that are absent from the canonical Bible books might be attributed to a lost apocryphal writing which possibly corresponds to a book entitled *Patriarchs* (Πατριάρχαι) mentioned in §§ 74–76 of a pseudo-Athanasian *Synopsis*. I would like to emphasize, however, the limitations set on identifying the precise sources for the authors' views on language history, given the fact that they probably relied on a complicated indirect tradition in which the passages that have been preserved constitute only some landmarks. We probably have to assume a broader debate relating to issues of language history, involving a considerably wider variety of (Jewish and Christian) participants and opinions than can be positively reconstructed today.

With the possible exceptions of Jerome and Ambrosiaster, early Christian Latin authors presumably became acquainted with the identification of the primeval language as Hebrew by way of early Christian Greek literature. Although it is possible that Latin authors had direct access to a Greek original, I will here briefly discuss two relevant passages which were first written in Greek but later on translated into Latin, and as such were (somewhat) more likely to influence early Christian Latin authors. The identification of the primeval language with Hebrew is attested in Rufinus' translation of the pseudo-Clementine *Recognitiones*, which has it (at 1.30.5) that until human language was diversified, 'the language of the Hebrews held the monopoly' (*Hebraeorum lingua tenuit monarchiam*) (cf. Hilhorst 2007: 780; Eskhult 2014: 316–317). Whereas Borst (1957: 233), Rubin (1998: 317), and Poirier (2010: 28) regard this passage as the earliest Christian evidence for the identification of the primeval language as Hebrew, Van Rooy (2013: 30–31) convincingly argues that this cannot be known for sure due to problems with the dating of the work. To the contrary, Van Rooy (2013: 28) singles out Origen (c.185–253/254) as the first Christian author to identify the primeval language with Hebrew. Indeed, it

books of Abraham's fathers' were written by Noah—that is, before the tower was built—in the primeval language, Hebrew. With Babel, the primeval language ceased to be spoken, but the books composed by Noah and passed on to his progeny were of course still written in Hebrew. This seems to imply that the books were handed down during several generations without anyone being able to read and understand them.

is stated in Rufinus' translation (410) of Origen's *In Numeros homiliae* 11.4 (GCS 30: 84) that the language which remained with the *portio Dei*, God's chosen people (i.e. the language that was previously common to all), is 'as we believe, the Hebrew language' (*ut putamus Hebraea*) (cf. Borst 1957: 235–236; Eskhult 2014: 314–315). Both in the Greek original and thanks to Rufinus' Latin translation, Origen's statement may have exerted a considerable influence in the Latin West and, as such, confirmed the notion among Christians that Hebrew was the primeval language.

Filastrius: Floating Conceptions of Language History (1)

In Christian literature originally written in Latin, the first statements on the identity of the primeval language occur only from the 380s onwards. The question is dealt with by Filastrius in *Diuersarum hereseon liber* 105, a chapter directed against a heresy vaguely described as one 'that argues that the name of (the) language (*nomen linguae*) has first proceeded from the Jews, or from the pagans as others say'. The imprecise term *lingua*, along with the absence of an article in Latin, allows Filastrius to use *nomen linguae* to cover the naming (a) of the human capacity of language, (b) of the primeval language, and (c) of its post-Babelic continuation. The gist of what seems to be Filastrius' own, 'orthodox' opinion is that the post-Babelic *nomen linguae* derives from Heber, who remained loyal to God by refusing to participate in the construction of the tower of Babel. Since Vattioni (1994)—despite the promising title 'La prima lingua in Filastrio da Brescia'—does not contribute to a better understanding of Filastrius' rather complicated exposition, and since Eskhult (2014) does not include Filastrius' position or that of the heretics he refutes, a detailed analysis of the relevant chapter will be offered in what follows.

In §1 Filastrius states that those who believe the *nomen linguae* to proceed from the Jews or from the pagans are seriously mistaken. Instead, he seems to posit the view that the one primeval language had no name (cf. Oehler 1865: 101–102 nn. d–e)—a view which can be found clearly articulated in Ambrosiaster and Augustine—or, at least, that it is pointless to inquire which name this might have been. Filastrius argues that 'man was made as taking part in reason' (*homo ... factus rationis participes fuit*), and asks how 'someone who spoke with reason' (*qui ... loquebatur ratione*) could be foreign to reason. He subsequently continues on this line of argument by writing (§2):

So it is more [important] to be first taking part in reason (*plus ergo prius est rationis esse participem*), and to be called rational (*et rationabilem*

*dici), than to have a particular and local name of some [specific] language (*quam nomen speciale et locale habere alicuius linguae*) and to possess a name after the name of a human (*atque ex nomine hominis possidere aliquid*).*

Filastrius thus seems to argue that it is far more important to be aware that man was created by God as a rational being which is as such capable of language and speech (Sect. 1.2, p. 44f.), than to find out precisely after whom a nation or language are named, since this is only a local, particular, and coincidental matter. However, in § 3 Filastrius writes that during the period stretching from Adam to Heber, ‘there was one name for the language of all men (*erat ... nomen linguae omnium hominum unum*)’, as well as one language (*et una lingua*)’. In trying to understand what Filastrius is saying, one could think of Augustine, who in *De ciuitate Dei* 16.11.1 designates the in his opinion ‘nameless’ primeval language as *humana lingua* or *humana locutio* (cf. below, p. 78). By way of this (anachronistic) analogy, one could hypothesize that it is something similar Filastrius has in mind.

Unfortunately, Filastrius complicates matters further in the subsequent sentence, by apparently lapsing into the heretic view which he summarizes and refutes in *Diuersarum hereseon liber* 104 (cf. below, p. 98f.). This heretic view entails that linguistic diversity existed already prior to the events of Babel, but that humans at this time were able to counter it thanks to a supernatural multilingual competence which they lost during the events of Babel. Having just stated that there was one language with one name for all people until Heber’s lifetime—when the events of Babel took place—he now repeats that

from the moment when they began to aspire against God, however, the heavenly knowledge (*caelestis scientia*) was taken away from them, that is, the prudence and wisdom in all languages (*id est linguarum omnium prudentia et sapientia*).

It seems difficult to reconcile this statement—which certainly refers to the heretic interpretation of the events of Babel (cf. below, p. 98f.)—with the ‘orthodox’ notion that there was a single language with a single name from Adam until Heber. There are two possible solutions to this problem. The first one involves that this sentence, or part of it, was inserted later on in the manuscript tradition, as a mistaken explanatory gloss on the basis of chapter 104. This hypothesis might be confirmed by the *id est* introduction of the phrase *linguarum omnium prudentia et sapientia*. The second, and perhaps the

more probable solution involves that Filastrius himself was simply unable to draw a clear distinction between his own views and the heresy he refuted. In the first scenario, too, it should be assumed that Filastrius himself used the confusing phrase *caelstis scientia* to designate (knowledge of) the one primeval language, on the basis of the heresy he refutes in chapter 104. In the light of Augustine's negative judgment on the global quality of Filastrius' work (cf. below, p. 77), it is likely that one of these explanations obtains, and it is precisely this kind of failures that affected Filastrius' intellectual authority and, thus, the scholarly impact of his work.

After this problematic sentence, Filastrius in § 4 seems to pick up his own, orthodox line of argument by developing the view that 'the name of the language' (*nomen linguae*) derives from Heber. The argument, which ties in with the reference to the events of Babel, reads as follows:

Heber for his part remained pious, for he did not depart from God, as would be consistent with his name (*qui non discessit a Deo secundum nomen ipsius*),⁸ and God wanted his stock to increase more amply, and to be called by this name for the first time in the history of the world (*Deus uoluit genus eius pullulare amplius hocque nomine primum in saeculo nuncupari*), so that after Heber, who had not agreed with the building of the tower by those who rebelled, they were called by the name *Hebrei* (*ut ab Heber, qui non consenserat aedificationi turris rebellantium, Hebrei nomine appellarentur*).

Unlike the passages of Filastrius' chapter discussed above, this exposition is relatively straightforward and probably represents Filastrius' own views. Heber refused to participate in the construction of the tower of Babel, and for this reason his progeny was named after him. Although it is not explicitly stated

⁸ This interpretation requires that the original meaning of the name 'Heber' belongs to the semantic field of 'to depart from', and that Filastrius is aware of this. There is indeed an etymology for 'Hebrew' which is based on the Hebrew verb חַבֵּר, meaning 'to pass over, to cross' (cf. Oehler 1856: 102 n. g.). This etymology is evidenced by Jerome, *Commentarii in Isaiam* 7.19.18: *Hebraeus περάτην, id est transitorem, sonat, qui de loco transit ad locum*. Jerome's gloss probably derives from Philo, *De migratione* 20 and other tractates, and it is also documented in the *Quaestiones in Octateuchum* 60–61 by Theodoret of Cyrrhus (cf. above, p. 61; Denecker 2014a: 27–28 n. 93). The precise historical and sociocultural circumstances in which Filastrius was active remain vague, but given the very subject matter of chapter 105, it cannot be excluded that Filastrius was in fact acquainted with this etymology.

by Filastrius, it is undoubtedly understood—due to the very concern of this chapter with the *nomen linguae*—that not only the ethnonym, but also the glottonym *Hebreus* goes back to Heber.

In the closing paragraphs of chapter 105 (§§5–7), Filastrius returns to the starting point of his exposition. He argues that the *nomen linguae* cannot go back to the pagans or to the Jews, since the proof of Heber's sanctity dates back to the period before there (allegedly) were any pagans or Jews. Accordingly, he states that the pagan stories about giants constructing towers—as in Homer's *Odyssey* 11.315—should be read as plagiarized versions of the story of Babel. It remains unclear precisely what is posited by those heretics who derive the *nomen linguae* from the *Iudaei*, and precisely how Filastrius religiously or ethnically conceives of the *Iudaei* from whom the *nomen linguae* would then derive. Possibly, Filastrius tries to loosen the connection some must have perceived between the figure of Heber and Judaism, in an effort to appropriate Heber as a precursor of the Christians. What can be concluded from chapter 105 of *Diuersarum hereseon liber* is that Filastrius himself most probably believed that there was a single (nameless?) primeval language and that this language has a special connection with the nation and the language which from Babel onwards were called *Hebreus* after Heber. It will be shown below that Filastrius' rough contemporary Ambrosiaster refutes the Heber eponymy in favour of an Abraham-centered model of language history, and that Augustine shifts from (implicitly) following the Abraham eponymy to developing a sophisticated Heber-centered model of language history.

Ambrosiaster: Floating Conceptions of Language History (2)

Around the same time as Filastrius, the anonymous Roman exegete now known as 'Ambrosiaster' in *Quaestiones ueteris et noui testamenti* 108 and—far more concisely—in *Commentarius in epistulas Paulinas* Phil. 3.7.3 expresses a peculiar view on the primeval situation in language history. He holds that the (nameless) primeval language ceased to exist as a coherent language during the events of Babel, when bits and pieces of it were dispersed among the different languages then newly arising. He furthermore argues that several generations after the events of Babel, God restored the primeval language as a whole to Abraham—in the same way as he had given it to the first man in paradise (cf. below, pp. 70 and 86)—in order to mark in him the 'renewal of faith'. Consequently, Ambrosiaster argues, this restored primeval language was called 'Hebrew' after Abraham (cf. Borst 1958: 379–380). It seems that for the sake of argument, Ambrosiaster in *Quaestio* 108 prefers the form *Habraham* to *Abraham*. Although it should be stressed that this orthography may be due to a later scribal intervention, I will maintain this form in my discussion of the views

expressed by Ambrosiaster in *Quaestio 108*.⁹ The account of the *Commentarius* will be discussed briefly below.

Ambrosiaster begins *Quaestio 108*¹⁰ (§1) by establishing an etymological foundation for his argument. Since everything made by God ‘conforms to reason’ or ‘has a reason of existence’ (*omne quod a Deo est, rationale est*), he states, each appellation is bound to derive from this reason of existence (*causa, origo, caput*). Accordingly, each appellation should reveal this reason of existence for the thing or human it denotes. Interesting for its own sake, this consideration is subservient to the point to be made from §2 onwards, where Ambrosiaster will show that the ethno- and glottonym *Hebreus* is derived not from Heber, but from Habraham.

At the outset of §2, Ambrosiaster mentions the opinion held by ‘some’ (*sicut quidam putant*), that the Hebrews are named after Heber (*ex Heber dictos Hebreos*), by virtue of the fact that Heber lived several generations before Habraham. He refutes this opinion by means of the claim that neither Habraham,¹¹ nor the members of Heber’s tribe living prior to Habraham are designated in the Bible as ‘Hebrews’. Since the sons of Habraham are the first to be designated as ‘Hebrews’ in the Bible, they are bound to be so named after Habraham (*ab Habraham dicuntur Hebrei*) and not after Heber. Subsequently, Ambrosiaster focuses on Habraham’s faith and virtue, and on the fact that he incorporates the renewal of faith within God’s plan for mankind (presumably drawing on a tradition based on Gen. 11:26–25:10). He singles out these arguments as the reasons why Habraham deserved to become ‘the origin of those who trace their branch from him’. According to the principles of transparent appellation expounded in §1, Habraham’s descendants were to be named after their ‘principle and origin’. And thus, ‘it was a testimony and an honour for his stock to be surnamed [*Hebrei*] after his name [*Habraham*], since he had pleased God in many ways and since he was their origin’.¹²

⁹ Ambrosiaster’s *Quaestio 108* has been discussed more briefly by Bardy (1932–1933 [1932]: 355), Lunn-Rockliffe (2007: 41), Jacobs (2006: 266–267), Dorival (2007: 187), Di Santo (2008: 216–217), Jacobs (2012: 63), and Eskhult (2013: 105; 2014: 318–321).

¹⁰ Eskhult (2014: 318) observes that ‘this chapter is entitled ‘the Hebrew language; from whom it got its name’’, but it should be specified that this title (*De lingua Hebreia, ex quo nomen acceperit*) was inserted by Souter, the editor of the *Quaestiones* (cf. CSEL 50:13 [app. crit.]).

¹¹ The phrase *Abram Hebraeo* only occurs in the Vulgate text of Gen. 14:13. To the contrary, the version of the *Veteres Latinae* on which Ambrosiaster relied renders the original Hebrew *Abram ha-‘ibri* as *Abram transfluviali*, in accordance with the Septuagint version (Eskhult 2014: 300, 318).

¹² Cf. *Quaestiones ueteris et noui testamenti* 44.10: *Quem ad modum enim ex Habraham Hebrei dicti sunt, sic et ex Christo Christiani dicuntur.*

Ambrosiaster proceeds in § 3 to defend Habraham and the Habraham eponymy, and to inveigh against the proponents of the Heber eponymy by accusing Heber of impiety ('For if his practice could be investigated, he would perhaps be found to have worshipped idols').¹³ In an earlier publication (Denecker 2014a: 6–7)—where I based my interpretation in part on Jacobs (2006: 266–267; 2012: 63) and Papsdorf (2008: 94–95 with n. 232)—I have stated that this difficult polemical paragraph was most probably directed against groups of Jews or 'Judaizing' Christians in Rome, who claimed Heber as exclusively their progenitor in order to present themselves as God's chosen people. In response to the appropriate criticism by Eskhult (2014: 319 n. 111), I would like to attenuate this interpretation in that the Heber eponymy might also have been claimed as a marker of identity by (a particular group of) non-Judaizing Christians (cf. above, p. 67, for the suggestion regarding Filastrius)—although in my opinion a Jewish or Judaeo-Christian background still cannot be excluded.

With regard to the ongoing debate in which Ambrosiaster's argument appears to engage (cf. above, p. 68: *sicut quidam putant*), it should be pointed out that Wittig (1909: 36–37) read Ambrosiaster's exposition as a rebuttal of Filastrius' argument in *Diuersarum hereseon liber* 105 (cf. above, p. 64f.). As we have seen, Filastrius was Ambrosiaster's rough contemporary and indeed an important proponent of the Heber eponymy. In addition, it is striking that both Filastrius (cf. above, p. 64f.) and Ambrosiaster (cf. below, p. 70) rely on the issue of *ratio* in their argumentation. However, they do so in clearly different ways, and Ambrosiaster insists on various points that are absent from Filastrius' argument. Although Wittig's interpretation cannot be entirely dismissed, I would prefer to suggest that Filastrius and Ambrosiaster represent diverging though not diametrically opposed positions in a debate which involved a considerably broader but now invisible spectrum of (Christian and Jewish) participants and opinions.

In § 4 Ambrosiaster further elaborates on the Habraham eponymy and on the history of Hebrew within his presentation of salvation history. The proponents of the Heber eponymy base their case on a weak argument, he states; the only element in favour of the Heber eponymy is the very assumption that 'Hebrew' derives from 'Heber'. However, in order to corroborate one's claim

¹³ This phrase should probably be read as an inversion ('retortion') of an argument used against Abraham, going back to the book of Jubilees, at 11:16: 'When he was two weeks of years [= 14 years], he separated from his father in order not to worship idols with him.' Cf. Ambrosiaster, *Quaestiones ueteris et noui testamenti* 115.11: *Ipse enim Abraham per fidem iustus factus legitur—ante ergo non fuit, quippe cum patre suo duce idola coluisse intellegatur.*

to the eponymy of ‘Hebrew’, one also needs ‘a manifest cause’ or ‘a clear reason’ (*perspicua ratione*) for this eponymy. The ‘manifest cause’ in favour of the Habraham eponymy is made up of the following considerations: Ambrosiaster states that ‘God deemed it worthy to visit mankind in Habraham and thus to take on a shape wholesome for men’; it is in Habraham that God restored what man had lost through his Fall; in Habraham, God set an example, in order for mankind to return to Him in the same way as Habraham had done. To this, Ambrosiaster adds a first important clue as to his precise views of language history: God did this ‘in order to restore to mankind both the worship of God and the language that previously had been given to be used by men (*sermonem, qui datus prius fuerat in usum hominum*)’. In the same way as God’s image had been in Adam before the Fall, it is now restored in Habraham, in order for faith to take a new start. In order to restore the adamic state of mankind in Habraham, God restores to Habraham the language He had first given to Adam (cf. *Jubilees*); and ‘hence, it is not out of place that the people that originates from Habraham also takes its name from him (*ut ex nomine eius plebs ab eo coepit uocabulum sortiretur*)’.

Ambrosiaster enters into the phonetic details of the Heber and Habraham eponymies in § 5. The proponents of the Heber eponymy are said to argue that the Hebrews are called *Hebrei* after *Heber*, not *Habraei* after *Habraham*. However, Ambrosiaster reminds his opponents of the fact that it is *Hebrei* and not *Heberei*, whereas no one would relate the ethnonym to one *Hebrer*. Invoking a particular sequence of ancient *permutationes litterarum* (Sect. 9.1, p. 294f.), he states that an original form *Habraei* (after *Habraham*) was changed into *Hebrei* for the sake of euphony: ‘for because of the sound, a letter was changed; thus, they are called ‘Hebrews’ instead of ‘Habreus’, because that sounds better’. In support of this point, Ambrosiaster adduces the analogous case of *Iudaei*, being derived from *Iuda* but (apparently) sounding better than *Iudai*, and the classic example of *medidie* being changed into *meridie* (Sect. 9.1, p. 295, and Denecker forthc.d). On a general level, he adds the consideration that ‘whenever something sounded harsh, a letter was changed, so that the word would possess a suitable sound’. In the conclusion of this paragraph, Ambrosiaster states that it is only reasonable ‘that both the language and the people are called by the name of Habraham’ (*ut nomine Habrae tam lingua quam populus nuncuparetur*).

The Habraham eponymy is of pivotal importance to Ambrosiaster’s central exposition of language history, occupying §§ 6–8. The language that at the end of § 5 is said to derive its name from Habraham, that is, the Hebrew language of his days, is identified in § 6 as the primeval language, used by universal mankind during the period from Adam onwards until the dispersion

of languages at Babel: 'So this is the language (*haec ergo lingua est*) which we say was originally given to Adam and others (*quam dicimus primitus datam Adae et ceteris*)'. In § 6 Ambrosiaster argues that the primeval language ceased to exist as such during the events of Babel, although pieces of it were preserved in the variety of languages arising at Babel:

so that not this [primeval] language anymore (*ut non iam haec*), but many languages instead arose from the substitution of certain words that took place (*sed multae ex hac immutatione habita quorundam dictorum existerent*); thus, this [primeval] language no longer had its former shape and yet it did not perish (*ut non haberet speciem nec tamen deperiret*), but as a whole it was divided over other languages (*sed tota confusa esset ceteris linguis*).

Ambrosiaster then proceeds to inquire how it is possible that the Hebrew language of his days is the same as the primeval language, given the fact that the primeval language ceased to exist as such at Babel. In § 7 he proposes two possible explanations: either the Hebrew language of his days is downright identical to the primeval language, or it is a reconstructed (i.e. composite) version of the primeval language. Ambrosiaster first proposes and seriously considers what can be termed the 'reconstruction hypothesis'. The linguistically interesting exposition of this reconstruction hypothesis runs as follows. If we do not accept that the Hebrew language of our days is downright identical to the primeval language, Ambrosiaster argues, the only option left is that it 'was assembled bit by bit out of other languages (*de ceteris linguis collecta sit particulatim*) and pieced together to the shape of one language (*compaginata in speciem linguae unius*)'—i.e. out of the pieces of the primeval language that had been scattered among the various post-Babelic languages (cf. § 6). This reconstructed language would then have been restored to Habraham because of his 'restored' faith,

in order for him, because he was the father of many nations (*pater multarum gentium*), to have a way of speaking made up of many languages (*ex multis linguis sermonem ... compositum*) and thus to be renewed in every respect (*per omnia innouatus*).

Until now—i.e., in the first part of § 7—Ambrosiaster has been drawing the outlines of the reconstruction hypothesis. He subsequently goes on to consider this alternative and to confront it with the possibility that the Hebrew language of his days is downright identical to the primeval language. Ambrosiaster

quotes the book of Genesis (11:1), where it is stated that those who came from the East to the plain of Shennar were ‘of one tongue and of one speech’. When God subsequently dispersed these people during the events of Babel, there was no one left there who retained the primeval language. As a consequence, Ambrosiaster argues, the Hebrew language of his days

does not have a land among the people, as other languages have, and not a nation except for the Jews, since it was given to the first man in paradise, and since after the languages were confused, the language that is now called ‘Habrew’ could nowhere be retrieved. So if it is true that it [the Hebrew language of Ambrosiaster’s days] nowhere has a place or a nation [except for the Jews], and if it is furthermore true that Habraham was a Syrian [and not a Jew] by birth, whence [came] then this language [*hanc linguam*, the Hebrew language of Ambrosiaster’s days] for Habraham and the rest of his progeny, unless it [*haec lingua*, the Hebrew language of Ambrosiaster’s days] either is that former language [*illa prior*, the primeval language] or at least [a language] assembled out of many languages [*de multis aptata*]? For we see that various languages bear similarities to that language [the Hebrew language of Ambrosiaster’s days].

Although this reasoning seems to lead towards the conclusion that the Hebrew language of his days is a reconstructed version of the primeval language, Ambrosiaster actually argues for the opposite explanation in § 8. Having first mentioned, at the end of § 7, the option that the Hebrew language of his days is downright identical to the primeval language, and second the possibility that it is a reconstructed language, he now states:

But that [the reconstruction hypothesis] does not agree to reason (*non sic conuenit rationi*) in the same way as the former alternative (*illud*), namely if it [the Hebrew language of Ambrosiaster’s days] would be said to be the primeval language itself (*si prima ipsa esse dicatur*).

In other words, having extensively considered the reconstruction hypothesis—presumably because it was seriously defended by another party (which is not directly documented) in the debate of his days—, Ambrosiaster concludes that it makes less sense than the option that the Hebrew language of his days is downright identical to the primeval language. Ambrosiaster does not explicitly state why, nor does he spell out exactly how the identity of the primeval language and the Hebrew language of his days is to be explained. In

the remainder of § 8, Ambrosiaster elaborates on the reasonable motivation for this instantaneous divine restitution. The primeval language had to be restored to Habraham in order that Moses, his descendant, would be able to use the language that God Himself had used when naming man ‘Adam’ and his wife ‘Eve’ (Sect. 2.3, p. 86). As a consequence, the restored primeval language in which were written the books that Habraham copied (cf. the book of Jubilees, 62f.), was to be used in the book of Moses as well (that is, in the Torah). Thus, Moses was able to ‘demonstrate that the first cause and the divine benefaction had been renewed in Habraham truly in every respect’.

As to the reason why the Hebrew language of his days is to be considered downright identical to the primeval language, it is possible that to Ambrosiaster’s mind, a language cannot at the same time be considered ‘primeval’ and ‘reconstructed’, and the composite nature of a reconstructed language is at odds with the unity and purity supposedly characteristic of the primeval language. As to the nature of the identity of the primeval language and the Hebrew language of his days, it should presumably be understood that the latter was given by God to Habraham instantaneously and in its entirety, in the same way as it had been given to Adam (cf. above, pp. 67, 70, and below, p. 86). On this point, I would like to indicate more emphatically than I have done elsewhere (Denecker 2014a: 14–15 with n. 49) the resemblance which this portion of Ambrosiaster’s argument bears to Theodoret of Cyrrhus’ exposition on language history (cf. above, p. 61). Theodoret clearly argues that Hebrew is nobody’s ‘natural’ mother tongue, but rather a ‘sacral’ or ‘liturgical’ language which is always acquired through instruction and in written form (not given ‘at once’, as Ambrosiaster holds). Although Ambrosiaster does not believe, like Theodoret, that the primeval language was Syriac, the latter language (or ethnicity) does play a role of importance in his argumentation (e.g. the notion that Abraham was a Syrian by birth, not a Jew). However, Theodoret lived from about 393 until 466, whereas the bulk of Ambrosiaster’s work is to be situated in the 370s and (early) 380s (Lunn-Rockliffe 2007: 12, 16). This precludes the possibility that Ambrosiaster was in some way inspired by Theodoret’s *Quaestiones in Octateuchum*, but rather urges the conclusion that Ambrosiaster’s and Theodoret’s arguments belong to a broader spectrum of views on language history—running across the Latin and the Greek spheres—which has now become hardly possible to reconstruct.

Ambrosiaster’s model of language history can be summarized as follows: initially, there was a single primeval language, which was given by God to Adam in paradise; this primeval language was maintained during the entire period stretching from Adam to Babel; as a reaction against the tower of Babel, God confused the primeval language of mankind; although parts of it were divided

among the various post-Babelic languages, the primeval language ceased to exist as such; during Habraham's lifetime, God restored the primeval language to Habraham instantaneously and in its entirety, in the same way as he had given it to Adam, in order to mark the renewal of faith in Habraham; accordingly, the restored primeval language was now called 'Hebrew' after 'Habraham'.

As I have shown elsewhere in more detail (Denecker 2014a: 12–14), the concise account of *Commentarius in epistulas Paulinas* Phil. 3.7.3 is hardly intelligible without recourse to the far more elaborate (and possibly older) version of the *Quaestiones*.¹⁴ In the *Commentarius* Ambrosiaster writes nothing about the possibility that the Hebrew language of his days would be a reconstructed version of the primeval language, and the idea that the primeval language was returned to Abraham instantaneously and in its entirety is for the most part left implicit, only emerging from the phrase *cum huic redditur*. The mention that Heber lived during the sixth generation before Abraham makes little sense without a statement of the opposite point of view, where it functions as an argument in favour of the Heber eponymy. Nevertheless, the *Commentarius* also adds a couple of elements which are absent from the *Quaestiones*. Firstly, the passing comment that Abraham was a Syrian (or a Chaldean, both may be considered equivalent in this context)¹⁵ is plainer in the *Commentarius*, although in both relevant passages this element is conveniently used within Ambrosiaster's general argument. And secondly, Ambrosiaster writes that the primeval language 'was without a name'; this is an element not explicitly stated in the *Quaestiones*, but one which has a possible parallel in Filastrius (cf. above, p. 64f.), and which will be elaborated upon by Augustine in his *De civitate Dei*.

Jerome: The (Re)introduction of Jewish Traditions

Relying on his privileged and widely proclaimed access to *Hebraica* and *Iudaica*, Jerome provides a number of brief but crucial statements on the identity

¹⁴ The account of the *Commentarius* reads as follows: *Hebraei tamen propter Abraham dicti sunt. Immutata est enim littera propter sonum, ut non uocarentur Abraei, sed Ebraei, ut apud ueteres, cum diceretur 'medidie' et esset absurdum, immutata est littera, ut diceretur 'meridie'. Si enim origo ex Abraham est, ex ipso trahi debet et nomen, non ex Heber, qui sexta generatione est ante (super) Abraham. Si enim in Abraham reformari coepit genus hominum et ipse est pater fidei, ex ipso et nomen et lingua Hebraea. Prima enim lingua, quae erat sine nomine, cum huic redditur, ex eo |et| accepit nomen. Nam nulla causa est, ut ex Heber trahat nomen; Abraham tamen Chaldaeus fuit, non tamen Chaldaeus linguam habent Hebraeam.*

¹⁵ On the long-standing glottonymic confusion between Syriac, Aramaic, and 'Chaldean', cf. Hilhorst (2007: 779–780) and Gallagher (2012: 123–131); and cf. p. 240.

of the primeval language. In *Ep. 18A.6.6–7* he argues that ‘the beginning of their speech’ (*principium oris eorum*)—which is one of his Latin interpretations of the Hebrew *seraphim* (Is. 6:2)—is in fact a reference to the Hebrew language (Borst 1958: 388; Barr 1966: 298; Amsler 1989: 113; Brown 1992: 74; Eskhult 2014: 317):¹⁶

The beginning of speech and of general conversation (*initium oris et communis eloquii*) and all that we say (*et hoc omne, quod loquimur*) is the Hebrew language (*Hebraeam linguam*), in which the Old Testament is written. So universal tradition reports (*uniuersa antiquitas tradidit*).

Given the fact that the status of Hebrew as the primeval language was not that firmly established yet in the Latin tradition (insofar as it has come down to us), Jerome’s reference to the *uniuersa antiquitas* should probably be taken to include Christian Greek as well as Jewish traditions. In *Commentarii in prophetas minores* Soph. 3.8/9 Jerome discusses a Jewish eschatological tradition according to which Hebrew will be the language spoken at the end of times (cf. Eshel & Stone 1993). Jerome does not subscribe to this belief,¹⁷ but when discussing it, he is led to deal with the issue of the primeval language. The Jewish tradition at issue has it that with the coming of Christ (which Jerome notes the

- ¹⁶ According to Eskhult (2014: 317 with n. 103; cf. 2014: 309), Jerome furthermore ‘informs us that bishop Victorinus of Pettau (*fl. 270, d. 303/304*) called Hebrew the first and common language (i.e. before Babel)’. Eskhult suggests that ‘Jerome probably consulted Victorinus’ commentary on Genesis, which he himself mentions in his treatise *De uiris illustribus*, chapter 74’. In order to corroborate this suggestion, he cites the following text of *Ep. 18A.6.7*: *Lingua Hebraea prima et communis. Victorinus Latinus auctor. Initium oris et communis eloquii, et hoc omne quod loquimur, Hebraeam linguam, qua Vetus Testamentum scriptum est, uniuersa antiquitas tradidit.* However, it should be noted that the text portion *Lingua Hebraea prima et communis. Victorinus Latinus auctor* does not belong to Jerome’s letter, but was inserted as a comment by the PL editor (22: 365). The former sentence summarizes Jerome’s opinion on the primeval language, whereas the latter relates to Jerome’s discussion of the subsequent verse part, *sex alae uni et sex alae alteri*. Jerome indeed cites Victorinus’ exegesis of this verse part, but this does not regard language history. Although it cannot be excluded that Victorinus in his lost commentary on Genesis (Schwarte 2002b: 718–719) dealt with the primeval language, this cannot be concluded from Jerome’s statements. There is thus no sufficient ground to include Victorinus of Pettau among the authors who formulate the idea that Hebrew was the primeval language.
- ¹⁷ Nor does Isidore, cf. *Etym. 9.1.13*: ‘It is also asked in which language humans will speak in the future life (*qua lingua in futurum homines loquantur*); the answer is nowhere to be found, for the Apostle says [1 Cor. 13:8]: ‘Or tongues shall cease’ (cf. Resnick 1990: 57).

Jews are still awaiting), all people will convert to the worship of the true God and all people will speak Hebrew—‘as was the case before the construction of the tower, when all nations spoke one language’. In the same commentary, at 3.14/18, Jerome notes to have rendered the Hebrew *nugim* (נוּגִים, from the root נָגַע) of Soph. 3:18 with the Latin *nugae* (Kedar-Kopfstein 1994: 423; Hille-Coates 2000a: 132–133; Gallagher 2012: 130; Eskhult 2014: 317). He states that *nugae* is in fact a Latin word in the Hebrew Bible text (Sect. 9.3, p. 328), and acknowledges to have maintained the word in his Latin translation as a kind of reminder, ‘in order for us to know that the Hebrew language is the mother of all languages (*omnium linguarum ... matricem*)’ (Sect. 7.3, p. 239). In a slightly modified form, this passage was integrated by Isidore (cf. below, p. 84), and it is important to note that Jerome’s terminological choice for *matrix* has interesting language-genealogical implications. Unfortunately, Jerome does not go into further detail, arguing that ‘it is not the right time to discuss this issue’. Nevertheless, it is clear from the three passages here reviewed that Jerome straightforwardly identifies the primeval language as Hebrew (Borst 1958: 389; Percival 1987a: 15; Kedar 1990: 315; Brown 1992: 74–75; Poirier 2010: 28).

Jerome also makes a brief but consequential contribution to the ongoing debate over whether the ‘Hebrew’ language and nation are named so after Heber or after Abraham. He does so when in *Quaestiones Hebraicae in Genesim* 10.24–25 concisely and in passing mentioning *Heber, a quo Hebraei*, a phrase which may be translated as ‘Heber, from whom the Hebrews issue’ or ‘Heber, after whom the Hebrews are named’—arguably, the phrase combines both meanings. Hayward (1995: 145) notes that Jerome here draws on Josephus’ *Antiquitates Iudaicae* 1.146 ‘for the statement that the Hebrews descend from Heber’. In the *Quaestiones Hebraicae in Genesim*, this reference work of Old Testament exegesis where Greek scholarship and Jewish traditions come together (Kamesar 1993, Hayward 1995), Jerome thus in an authoritative way reintroduces the notion that ‘Hebrew’ derives from Heber. In this light, it should be emphasized that the reading *Abram Hebraeo* is an innovation in the Vulgate version of Gen. 14:13 (as against the reading *Abram transfluviali* of the *Veteres Latinae*; Eskhult 2014: 300, 318), which is possibly due to Jerome. The chunks of information introduced by Jerome presumably played a role of significance in Augustine’s development of a canonical model of language history.

Augustine: The Development of a Canonical Model of Language History

The primeval situation in language history is a subject that occupied Augustine on several occasions during his career. His 'definitive' discussion of the problem can be found in book 16 of the *De ciuitate Dei*. There Augustine offers an extensive 'canonical' exposition which can be read as a reaction against the floating and rather vague models of language history proposed in the course of the previous century, and which is at least in part based on the *Iudaica* provided in Jerome's works. Whereas the possible historical connection between Filastrius' and Ambrosiaster's expositions on the issue has been discussed above, it is important to mention that Augustine had met Filastrius (cf. Introduction, p. 16) and used his catalogue of heresies when writing his *De haeresibus*, but did not appreciate it much (Bardy 1930: 404–407; Di Berardino 1999: 368–369, Di Berardino & O'Daly 2004–2010). On this line of thought, it can be suggested that Filastrius' failure to propose a model of language history sharply distinct from the heresy he refuted may have formed an additional incentive for Augustine to develop his own, 'canonical' model of language history. Nevertheless, Filastrius' straightforward plea in favour of the Heber eponymy may also have set Augustine thinking about the potential advantages of developing a Heber-centered model of language history.

Even more importantly, I have argued extensively elsewhere (Denecker 2014a) that Augustine was almost certainly acquainted with the Abraham-centered model of language history developed by Ambrosiaster and adopted this model in the initial stage of his career, but later on departed from it in the direction of the Heber-centered model proposed in book 16 of *De ciuitate Dei*. The development of Augustine's thought on language history will here be discussed with special reference to the primeval situation, whereas his views on the origin of language diversity will be discussed in Chapter 3. Attention will be paid to the connections with Ambrosiaster's expositions exhibited by Augustine's views, which are highlighted in particular by Augustine's insistence on the eponymy of 'Hebrew'.

A The 'Definitive' Model of *De ciuitate Dei*

In spite of O'Daly's (1999: 172) remark on *De ciuitate Dei* 16.6 that Augustine 'has little to say about the multiplicity of human languages other than that it exists', book 16 (begun after 412 and completed in or around 419) of Augustine's *De ciuitate Dei* contains an account that must be considered foundational for later ages of Western thought on language history. The impact of Augustine's model of language history on early modern thought has been duly acknowledged most importantly by Eskhult (2012: 384; cf. Eskhult 2013), who designates the

passage in *De ciuitate Dei* as ‘the most detailed exposition’ of the opinion that Hebrew was the primeval language. Likewise, Klein (1999: 27) refers to the model in terms of ‘der grundlegenden Darstellung des Gottesstaates’.¹⁸ The historical development of the Hebrew language is inextricably bound up with the theology of history which Augustine elaborates in his *De ciuitate Dei*, ‘in which the unfolding in time of the two cities, the earthly and the heavenly, is shown’ (Rist 2012: 220).

By combining and rearranging elements from §§ 3, 4, 6, 10, and 11 of book 16, it is possible to outline Augustine’s ‘definitive’ position on the primeval situation in language history as follows. Augustine holds that throughout the entire period stretching from Adam to Babel, a single primeval language was common to all mankind (*una ... qua sola uniuersum genus humanum loquebatur*). During this period, the primeval language had no name; it was simply called ‘human language’ (*humana lingua*) or ‘human speech’ (*humana locutio*) since there was no need at this point to distinguish it from other languages. For the notion that the primeval language had no name, Augustine presumably drew on Ambrosiaster’s *Commentarius in epistulas Paulinas* Phil. 3.7.3 (cf. above, p. 74; Borst 1958: 380, 398), and possibly—but with far less probability—on Filastrius’ *Diuersarum hereseon liber* 105.

Augustine goes on to explain that during the lifetime of Heber and his son Peleg, the members of the ‘earthly’ or ‘impious city’ began to build the tower of Babel. God reacted with the division of languages, which not only put an end to the construction of the tower, but also gave rise to the various nations of mankind (Sect. 3.3, p. 110f.). Since the construction of the tower was a manifestation of the ‘city of the ungodly’, it was these ungodly people who were ‘punished and divided by the diversity of languages’ (*linguarum diuersitate puniae atque diuisae sunt*). However, even at the time of Babel the ‘heavenly city’ or a ‘godly race of man’ was also represented in history, namely in the house of Heber, which was not affected by God’s punishment for Babel. Accordingly, the nameless language that had been common to entire mankind before Babel continued to exist in the house of Heber (*domus Heber, ubi ea quae antea fuit omnium lingua remaneret*).

Since there was now a variety of languages instead of a single ‘human language’, the language that directly continued the primeval language needed to be distinguished from other languages by means of a name of its own (*tunc enim*

¹⁸ The content of Augustine’s *De ciuitate Dei* relating to language history is also summarized by Rubin (1998: 318–319) and by Hille-Coates (2000a: 133–134). Eskhult (2014: 328–331) summarizes the content of *De ciuitate Dei* 16.11 in particular.

opus erat eam distingui ab aliis linguis nomine proprio). As it continued to exist in the house of Heber (*quia ergo in eius familia remansit haec lingua*), the language was named ‘Hebrew’ after him (*ideo deinceps Hebraea est nuncupata*)—not after Abraham, as Augustine makes plain in § 3 (cf. below, p. 81). Augustine attaches great weight to the continuity of the primeval language, as he takes it to mark the uninterrupted persistence of the ‘heavenly city’ throughout history. Whereas before Babel, the uninterrupted line of the heavenly city stretches from Sem to Heber, it continues after Babel from Heber to Abraham and from Abraham to Jacob, or Israel. This post-Babelic line of the ‘heavenly city’ is marked by the transmission of the Hebrew language: ‘Heber himself did not hand that language on to all his progeny, but only to the line whose generations led down to Abraham’, and Abraham did not ‘transmit it to all his offspring, but only to those who were descended from him through Jacob’.

The link between Ambrosiaster’s and Augustine’s models of language history is apparent on three points. First, both authors’ models of language history appear to be essential parts of their respective theologies of history. While Ambrosiaster’s model of language history is perfectly apt for a theology of history involving rupture and renewal, Augustine’s model is particularly fit for a theology of history stressing the continuous historical development of a ‘heavenly city’ as opposed to an equally persistent ‘earthly city’—thanks to the fact that the events of Babel coincide in history with Heber’s lifetime. Second, both authors feel the need of highlighting a single pivotal figure in God’s plan for mankind, after whom the Hebrews and their language are said to be named. While Ambrosiaster holds that ‘Hebrew’ derives from Abraham and argues against the Heber eponymy, Augustine in his definitive model of language history gives preference to the Heber eponymy—though still attributing a role of significance to the person of Abraham. Third, both authors posit the existence of a nameless primeval language before the events of Babel, which afterwards continued to exist as ‘Hebrew’. This is probably a significant link, since Ambrosiaster is the only (preserved) Christian Latin author prior to Augustine formulating this point of view in a clear-cut way (by contrast to Filastrius).

B Language History and the Eponymy of ‘Hebrew’ throughout Augustine’s Works

Whereas Augustine proposed his ‘definitive’ model of language history in book 16 of his *De ciuitate Dei*, he occupied himself with the question on various other occasions in his career.¹⁹ Augustine for the first time touches on the

¹⁹ For a more concise reconstruction of the evolution in Augustine’s thought on the issue, cf. Eskhult (2014: 333–334).

eponymy of ‘Hebrew’ in his *De consensu euangelistarum* 1.14.21 (400), when referring to ‘Abraham, with whom the race of the Hebrews began’. Without explicitly stating that the ethno- and glottonym ‘Hebrew’ derives from ‘Abraham’—which is retrospectively affirmed by the account of *Retractationes* 2.16 (cf. below, p. 82)—Augustine does present Abraham as the father of the Hebrew race.²⁰ He thus seems to adopt the Abraham eponymy of ‘Hebrew’, which is central to Ambrosiaster’s model of language history. It should be emphasized that this adoption is only implicit and that Augustine himself may have interpreted his statement as such only secondarily (i.e. in the *Retractationes*). Augustine comes back to the subject in his *Quaestiones in Heptateuchum* 1.24 (419). He there formulates the question as to why Sem is called ‘the father of all the sons of Heber’ in Gen. 10:21, while it appears from Gen. 10:22–24 that Heber lived only in the fifth generation after Sem (cf. Rüting 1916: 8). This is a question which Augustine answers extensively in *De ciuitate Dei* 16.3.2 (cf. below, p. 81):

Is it because they are said to be named ‘Hebrews’ after him? For it is via him that the line of generations continues to Abraham. Accordingly, it is appropriately asked which option is more probable, namely whether they were called *Hebraei* as if they were *Heberaei*, or [were called *Hebraei*] as if they were *Abrahaei*.

It is important to note that the *Quaestiones*, like the *Locutiones in Heptateuchum*, are the result of the reading and annotation of the Heptateuch which Augustine undertook during his preparation of books 11 to 22 of *De ciuitate Dei*. Both works, for which Augustine drew among other sources on Jerome’s *Quaestiones Hebraicae in Genesim* (Cavallera 1931; Bardy 1932–1933 [1932]: 519; Madec 1999: 155), were finished in 419, simultaneously with or shortly before books 15 and 16 of *De ciuitate Dei* (Rüting 1916: 1, 7–8; Bardy 1959: 29; O’Daly 1986–1994: 974; Geerlings 2002a: 91).

In the above quotation, which should be read as a preparatory note for *De ciuitate Dei* 16.3.2, Augustine explicitly discusses the eponymy of ‘Hebrew’, but only states the ‘Heber’ and ‘Abraham’ eponymies as worthy alternatives, and then leaves the question unresolved. On the one hand, Augustine’s use of the supposedly prior forms *Heberaei* and *Abrahaei* in referring to both possibilities

²⁰ Also cf. the oblique hint in *De ciuitate Dei* 16.43.3: *Ab adulescentia quippe incipit homo posse generare; propterea generationum ex Abraham sumpsit exordium; qui etiam pater gentium constitutus est, quando mutatum nomen accepit. Ante hunc ergo uelut pueritia fuit huius generis populi Dei a Noe usque ad ipsum Abraham; et ideo in lingua inuenta est, id est Hebraea.* On the figure of Abraham throughout Augustine’s works, cf. Mayer (1986).

is strongly reminiscent of Ambrosiaster's treatment of the phonetic conditions allowing for the eponymy of 'Hebrew', both in his *Quaestiones* and his *Commentarius*. On the other hand, the fact that Augustine considers the Heber eponymy a valuable option indicates that at some point during or before his preparatory readings for the *De ciuitate Dei*, his acquaintance with Ambrosiaster's treatment of the issue was supplemented and challenged by the alternative eponymy in Jerome's *Quaestiones Hebraicae in Genesim* and in Filastrius' (far less authoritative) *Diuersarum hereseon liber* (cf. above, p. 64f.).

The most substantial link to Ambrosiaster's expositions is in 16.3.2 of *De ciuitate Dei*, a passage standing apart from the consistent account in 16.11, and resolving the questions formulated in the above quotation from the *Quaestiones in Heptateuchum*:

It is not without reason, however, that Heber is named as the foremost of all the descendants of Sem, and is given precedence over Sem's sons even though he belongs to the fifth generation. For it is true that, as we are taught, the Hebrews were named after him: that they were, so to speak, *Heberaei*. There is, indeed, another possible opinion: that they seem to be named after Abraham, and are thus called *Abrahaei*, as it were. But it is, in fact, undoubtedly true that they were named *Heberaei* after Heber, and later, with the omission of one letter, *Hebraei*. The Hebrew language exists only among the people of Israel; and it is in that people, and in the saints, and, in a shadowy and mysterious sense, in all mankind, that the pilgrim City of God is embodied.

For a number of reasons, this passage allows us to assume that Augustine had read Ambrosiaster's expositions on language history and is now reacting against them. First, Augustine mentions the supposedly prior forms *Heberaei* and *Abrahaei*, as he did in his *Quaestiones in Heptateuchum*.²¹ Second, he adduces an operation of *permutatio litterarum* (*detractio* or omission, in this case) in order to account for the change of *Heberaei* into *Hebraei*. Both elements correspond to Ambrosiaster's practice in his *Commentarius* and his *Quaestio 108.5*. Third, there is Augustine's explicit reference to, and denial of 'another possible opinion', namely the Abraham eponymy of 'Hebrew'.

As Rütting has pointed out, this denial stands in contrast to the undecidedness of the *Quaestiones in Heptateuchum*, which were finished around the same

²¹ Augustine does not mention the 'H' in Ambrosiaster's *Habraham*, but it has been noted that this 'H' may simply be due to a scribal intervention (possibly of later date).

date (cf. above, p. 80; Rüting 1916: 8). It is conceivable that Augustine did not review the preparatory notes collected in his *Quaestiones* and harmonize them to the account of his *De ciuitate Dei* when publishing both works. In accordance to his common practice when borrowing material from Ambrosiaster (Lunn-Rockliffe 2007: 17–19), Augustine in the passage above does not mention a source. However, it is obvious that an earlier text underlies Augustine's argument in this passage. As regards composition, content, and phrasing, Ambrosiaster's expositions perfectly fit the profile of such a source text for Augustine's argument.

Augustine for the last time deals with the issue in his *Retractationes*, the 'autobio-bibliography' (Pelikan 1999: xiv) he wrote in 426/427, purporting to provide an authorized canon of his intellectual legacy (cf. Hunter 2009: 7). He defines his final position with regard to the eponymy of 'Hebrew' when reviewing the relevant passage of his *De consensu euangelistarum*, at 2.16 (cf. above, p. 80):

As regards my statement in this book [*De consensu euangelistarum*] that 'the people of the Hebrews traced their origin to Abraham', it is indeed possible that the *Hebrei* seem to be so named as if they were *Abrahei*. But they are taken more truthfully to be named after him whose name was *Heber*, as if they were *Heberei*; on this, I have written to due extent in the sixteenth book of my *De ciuitate Dei*.

In this passage, Augustine authorizes the elaborate model of language history he developed in book 16 of his *De ciuitate Dei* and, in doing so, affirms his definitive preference for the Heber eponymy of 'Hebrew'.²² But although he concludes that the Heber eponymy has a better claim to truth (*uerius*), he still acknowledges the reasonable credibility (*est quidem et hoc credibile*) of the Abraham eponymy. As I have argued extensively elsewhere (Denecker 2014a), the shift in Augustine's thought is due at least in part to the fact that on the one hand, the intellectual authority of Ambrosiaster's writings was negatively affected by the anonymous or pseudepigraphous form in which they circulated (cf. Introduction, p. 22), while on the other hand, Augustine increasingly acknowledged Jerome's authority in Hebrew matters in the course of his career (Sect. 5. Interlude, p. 178f.).

²² Lagrange (1931: 386) discusses this passage, but does not take into account the evolution in Augustine's thought and the link with Ambrosiaster.

The ‘Canonizing’ Tradition between Augustine and Isidore

Augustine’s ‘definitive’ exposition on language history in *De ciuitate Dei* 16 almost immediately began to provide the standard position on the issue. In the initial stage of this evolution, Augustine’s intellectual network (cf. Introduction, p. 16) played a significant role. Augustine’s pupil and friend Quodvultdeus in his *Liber promissionum et praedictorum Dei* 1.9.15 refers to ‘Heber, in whom Hebrew, the first language (*Hebraea prima lingua*), remained, and from whom the Hebrew stock took its name’. Quodvultdeus argues that the primacy of Hebrew is shown by the inscription on Christ’s cross (Sect. 7.2, p. 234f.), and also mentions the position previously refuted by Augustine. ‘So from the aforementioned Heber’, he writes, ‘the progeny runs until Abraham, after whom, as some say, they are named *Abraei* as after Heber they are named *Hebraei*’. The phrasing of this sentence is strongly reminiscent of Ambrosiaster’s expositions and of Augustine’s reaction at 16.3.2 of his *De ciuitate Dei*, but the Abraham eponymy seems to have become a minority opinion by the time when Quodvultdeus was writing.²³

Claudius Marius Victorius in his didactic Bible epic entitled *Alethia* writes at the outset of the Babel episode (3.252) that ‘they are one nation, and they have the same kind of speech (*eadem quoque forma loquendi*)’. By the end of his rewritten Babel narrative (3.298–302) he specifies that ‘the ancient sound and speech of the Hebrew language (*oris Hebraei sonitus et sermo*)’ remained with those who had no share in the construction of the tower (Martorelli 2008: 40, 151; Eskhult 2014: 322). Cassiodorus straightforwardly identifies the primeval language as Hebrew in his *Expositio Psalmorum* 54.10. Without entering into the question whether the primeval language really had a name at that time, Cassiodorus posits that before Babel, ‘the world in our opinion employed only Hebrew words (*mundus Hebraeis tantum ... sermonibus utebatur*)’ (Borst 1958: 430–431; Eskhult 2014: 323).

The Gothic historiographer Jordanes, too, simply identifies the primeval language as Hebrew in his *Romana* 9. He refers to the period stretching from Noah until Heber, ‘in whom the nation and the ancient language of the Hebrews (*Hebraeorum gens et lingua prisca*) remained’. Apart from the identification of the primeval language as Hebrew, Jordanes thus subscribes to Heber’s pivotal role in language history. This is confirmed a little further on, when he starts a computation of years with ‘Heber, from whom the Hebrews’ (*Heber, a quo*

²³ The Heber eponymy of ‘Hebrew’ is also maintained, without explicit connection to language history, by Eucherius of Lyons, *Instructiones ad Salonium* 2 (CCSL 66: 200) and by Gregory the Great, *Homiliae in Hiezechihalem prophetam* 2.8.13.

Hebraei) (Borst 1958: 443–444; Eskhult 2014: 323). All of the passing remarks discussed in this subsection seem to have contributed to the process of ‘canonizing’ Augustine’s definitive position with regard to language history, which was to culminate in Isidore of Seville’s ‘codification’ of Augustine’s model.

Isidore’s Codification of Augustine’s Model of Language History

The works of Isidore contain various scattered but important remarks on the primeval situation in language history. Integrating, in a slightly modified version, the statement made by Jerome in *Commentarii in prophetas minores* Soph. 3.14/18, Isidore twice (*Etym.* 1.3.4 and 10.191) straightforwardly identifies the primeval language as Hebrew (Borst 1958: 446–455). He respectively states that the Latin letter *a* was shaped, by mediation of the Greek *alpha*, after the Hebrew *aleph* (Sect. 10.2, p. 363f.), and that the word *nugae* occurs in the Hebrew Bible text, ‘in order for us to know that Hebrew is the mother of all languages (*omnium linguarum ... matrem*)’ (Percival 1987a: 15; Eskhult 2014: 323–324). At 12.1.2 Isidore argues that when Adam gave names to the animals (cf. below, p. 87), he did so not in Latin, Greek, or any other language, ‘but in that language which, before the Flood,²⁴ was the language of all nations, which is called Hebrew’. In *Quaestiones in uetus testamentum* Gen. 9.4 he states that at the time when linguistic diversity arose, ‘the language that existed before remained in the house of Heber solely’. The notion that the Hebrews and—it is implied—their language issue from Heber is repeated by Isidore time and again.²⁵

Isidore’s key exposition on the primeval situation in language history can be found in *Etym.* 9.1.1, which relies heavily on Augustine’s *De ciuitate Dei* 16 and as such ‘codifies’ Augustine’s definitive model of language history for subsequent ages (cf. Eskhult 2014: 323).²⁶ Before society was divided upon the construction of the tower of Babel, Isidore says, ‘there was one language for all nations (*una omnium nationum lingua*), which is called Hebrew’.²⁷ While codifying Augustine’s definitive position on the primeval situation, Isidore considerably condenses and simplifies Augustine’s account. Instead of presenting Hebrew as the continuation of the further nameless *humana lingua* or *humana locutio*

²⁴ Isidore normally holds, like other early Christian Latin authors, that language diversity originated with the events of Babel. When in this passage, the Flood (Gen. 6–9) and not Babel (Gen. 11) is presented as the ‘watershed’ in language history, this confusion possibly goes back to the discrepancy between Gen. 10 and 11 (Sect. 3.1, p. 97f.).

²⁵ Cf. *Etym.* 5.39.5–6, 9.2.5, 9.2.38, 9.2.51–52; *Allegoriae in uetus testamentum* 18 (PL 83: 103); *Quaestiones in uetus testamentum* Gen. 9.4 (PL 83: 238); *Chronicon* 1/2.21–22.

²⁶ Cf. the parallels indicated by Reydellet (1984: 30–31 n. 1).

²⁷ Also cf. *Etym.* 9.1.11: *illa lingua una et sola, quae fuit antequam esset linguarum diuersitas*.

that was common to all before Babel, Isidore simply calls the primeval language ‘Hebrew’. On a more general level—elaborating upon Reydellet’s remark (1984: 31; tr. mine) that Isidore’s phrase *linguarum diuersitas* instead of Augustine’s *confusio linguarum* suggests a ‘scientific objectivity’—one could suggest that Isidore’s codified version of Augustine’s exposition is also detached from the original framework of Augustine’s theology of history, contrasting a ‘heavenly’ to an ‘earthly city’.²⁸ Without doubt, this relates to the fact that Isidore integrates Augustine’s ideas into the framework of his ethnolinguistic description.

By way of the *Etymologiae*, which is in Curtius’ words (⁶1967: 487) the ‘Grundbuch des ganzen Mittelalters’, Augustine’s definitive model of language history and the Heber eponymy of ‘Hebrew’ inherent to it were ready to be transmitted to the Middle Ages. It has indeed been shown by Klein (1999: 27) and most importantly by Eskhult (2012: 384–385; 2013: 108–115) that Augustine’s Heber-centered model of language history continued to be a basic component for views on language history during the medieval and early modern periods. A question calling for further examination is whether Ambrosiaster’s Abraham-centered model, too, exerted some influence among medieval and, possibly, among early modern intellectuals (owing to the fact that his writings circulated under Augustine’s and Ambrose’s names at least until the latter decades of the 17th century; cf. Introduction, p. 22). For instance, traces of the Abraham eponymy are clearly visible in Bede’s *Hexaemeron* 3.14.13 (De Maeyer & Denecker forthc.), and the figure of Abraham plays a role of importance in Josephus Justus Scaliger’s (1540–1609) model of language history (Van Hal 2010: 158–159).

3 The ‘Language of Adam’ and the ‘Language of God’

In the canonical Bible books, the primeval language is nowhere explicitly designated as the ‘language of Adam’ or as the ‘language of God’—although it should be stressed that within a Judaeo-Christian, biblical framework, there is in fact no logical alternative. But as far as the textual evidence is concerned, it is only understood from Gen. 2:19–20 that when he imposed names on the living creatures, Adam made use of the primeval language. There are even less biblical grounds for assuming that God availed himself of the primeval language in

28 Reydellet (1984: 30–31 n. 1) indicates the verbal parallels with works by Augustine and Jerome. The passages concerned are Augustine, *De Genesi ad litteram libri duodecim* 9.12.20 and *De ciuitate Dei* 16.11 next to Jerome, *Ep. 18A.6.6–7*. All of these passages have been discussed above.

Creation—apart from passages in direct speech attributed to God and standing in Hebrew in the source text of the Old Testament. However, the apocryphal Hellenistic-Jewish book of Jubilees (cf. above, p. 62f.) does explicitly identify the primeval language not only as Hebrew but also as the language used by God and by Adam (Rubin 1998: 309–310; Hilhorst 2007: 780; Moss 2010: 123; Gallagher 2012: 112–113). As a consequence, the explicit identification of the primeval language as the language of Adam and/or of God is not uncommon in Jewish and in early Christian Greek literature on the issue. In Rufinus' translation of Origen's *In Numeros homiliae* 11.4 (GCS 30: 84) it is explicitly stated that the language which remained with the *portio Dei*—that is Hebrew, in Origen's opinion (cf. above, p. 63f.)—is also 'the language at first passed down through Adam' (*lingua per Adam primitus data*) (Van Rooy 2013: 28). The primeval language is thus explicitly designated as the language of Adam.

The Primeval Language as the 'Language of Adam'

Contrary to what one might expect, very few early Christian Latin authors *explicitly* identify the primeval language as the language used by Adam in paradise. It should be emphasized, however, that the notion that there was only one language before Babel necessarily implies that this single language was also the one which was used by Adam.

Although the textual evidence is very meagre, it is most probably justified to infer this identification from Filastrius' statement in *Diuersarum hereseon liber* 105.2–3 that 'two thousand and seven hundred years passed by from Adam until Heber' and that during this period, there was one language for all men (cf. above, p. 65). Filastrius' contemporary Ambrosiaster in *Quaestiones ueteris et noui testamenti* 108.4 explicitly identifies the primeval language—Hebrew, in his opinion (cf. above, p. 67f.)—as the language of Adam. The exegete refers to the primeval language as 'the language which had previously been given in use to men' (*sermonem, qui datus prius fuerat in usum hominum*), and at 108.6 states that 'this is the language which we say was originally given to Adam and others (*primitus datam Adae et ceteris*)'. Furthermore, Ambrosiaster claims at 108.8 that Abraham had to have 'the very language which the first of men had (*quam habuit primus homo*)' in order that Moses would later on be able to use this language when composing the Heptateuch.

Augustine likewise explicitly identifies the primeval language as the language of Adam in *De Genesi ad litteram libri duodecim* 9.12.20 (Barański 1989: 214; Lau 2003: 40 n. 117; Eskhult 2014: 327–328), which is remarkably enough the most 'skeptic' of his treatments of the primeval language. Augustine indicates that there was a certain consensus on the issue among his predecessors and contemporaries when writing that 'we have been taught, to be sure, that there

was but one language originally', but subsequently objects to the relevance of this issue by asking the following rhetorical question: 'whatever that language may have been, is there any point in trying to find out?' Nevertheless, the identity of the primeval language with the language of Adam is beyond any doubt to Augustine: 'it is certainly in that language that Adam used to speak (*illa certe tunc loquebatur Adam*), and it is in that language ... that words were articulated with which the first man put names to the animals and the flying things'.²⁹ In fact, Augustine does nothing more here than make the inevitable implication of the biblical narrative explicit; the primeval language is by necessity also the language which was used by Adam when naming the living beings (Sect. 1.1, p. 36f.).

It is not until Isidore's *Etymologiae* that the primeval language is again explicitly identified as the language of Adam. Isidore at 12.1.1–2 follows Augustine's lead by arguing that 'Adam was the first to confer names on all the animals' and makes it plain that Adam gave names to the animals not in Latin, Greek, or any other language, 'but in that language which, before the Flood, was the language of all nations, which is called Hebrew'. The fact that Isidore refers to the period before the Flood and not to the period before Babel is slightly disconcerting (it possibly arises from the confusing contradiction between Gen. 10 and 11), but this phrasing does not contradict the identification of the primeval language as the language of Adam. This is a very straightforward identification of the primeval language both as Hebrew and as the language of Adam.

The 'Language of God' Identified as the Primeval Language

The explicit identification of the 'language of God' as the primeval language and/or as Hebrew is very uncommon in early Christian Latin literature. It does occur in *Quaestiones ueteris et noui testamenti* 108 by Ambrosiaster, who was undoubtedly influenced by the book of Jubilees. Having established that the primeval language was also the language given by God to Adam in paradise (cf. above, p. 86), the exegete claims at 108.8 that God restored this language as 'Hebrew' to Abraham in order that Moses—when later on composing the Heptateuch—would be able to use the language 'in which God spoke (*qua Deus locutus est*) and called man 'Adam', and in which Adam's wife was called 'Eve'. Apart from Ambrosiaster, an indirect inference can be made from Jerome's *Commentarii in Isaiam* 6.13.10, where the author discusses pagan beliefs about the number and names of the stars. Jerome states that the Hebrews do not use

²⁹ Cf. Augustine's *Contra Julianum opus imperfectum* 5.1: ... *Adam, qui uniuersis generibus animarum uiuarum nomina imposuit.*

the Greek and Latin names for stars, but instead have names of their own. In order to corroborate this point, he argues that

in the same way as God called the light ‘day’, the firmament ‘heaven’, the dry ‘earth’, and assemblings of water ‘seas’, in this way he also called the different stars by their own names, the proper nature of which our language does not render (*quarum proprietatem nostra lingua non exprimit*).

Although the textual evidence is rather slim, this passage can be taken to imply that the language used by God when naming day, heaven, earth, seas (Gen. 1:5–10), and stars (Gen. 1:14–15), was neither Latin nor Greek, but Hebrew, since Jerome states that it is hard to translate the names at issue into Latin. It is remarkable that the two authors who identify the ‘language of God’ as the primeval language and as Hebrew (or seem to do so, in Jerome’s case) both had a more than common familiarity with Jewish traditions, as is shown by Ambrosiaster’s acquaintance with the book of Jubilees (cf. Eskhult 2013: 105; Denecker 2014a: 15–17),³⁰ and by Jerome’s widely proclaimed access to the *Hebraica ueritas* (Rebenich 1993; Ch. 5, p. 150f.).

Augustine’s ‘Spiritual’ Interpretation of the ‘Language of God’

The ‘language of God’ is an important and multifaceted theme throughout Augustine’s writings (cf. e.g. Hübner 2004–2010a: 1002–1003; Burton 2007: 14–15). It has become clear in the above that Augustine establishes a continuity between the nameless primeval language and post-Babelic Hebrew, and straightforwardly qualifies the primeval language as the language of Adam. On the contrary, Augustine firmly opposes an identification of the ‘language of God’ with the primeval language, since this is in his opinion a ‘literal’ or ‘corporeal’ interpretation (cf. Kirwan 1994: 208–210; Gera 2003: 50). It should be emphasized that from now on, we will be moving away from the actual theme of the language used by God during Creation, towards the question of how God communicates with humans generally, at any moment subsequent to the events described in the first chapters of Genesis. However, these two themes are of course strongly related, and for this reason it seems necessary to discuss both of them.

³⁰ Ambrosiaster’s exceptional interest in *Iudaica* even brought scholars from past centuries (most notably Morin) to believe that Ambrosiaster was himself a convert from Judaism. This hypothesis has now been abandoned, cf. Lunn-Rockliffe (2007: 41–42).

A key passage for Augustine's stance can be found in *De Genesi ad litteram libri duodecim* 1.2.5 (cf. Lau 2003: 11, 40 n. 117), where the author refers to the possible interpretation that God spoke with a corporeal voice both in Creation and to the second person of Trinity. If this was indeed the case, he subsequently asks, 'what language was this voice speaking?' Augustine reminds his readers of the fact that there was no diversity of languages yet, since this reality only came about with the events of Babel (Sect. 3.3, p. 110f.). On this literal line of interpretation, the language used by God should have been the one primeval language of mankind (*lingua ... una et sola*). However, Augustine moves on to propose his own 'spiritual' interpretation of the 'language of God' in the form of a rhetorical question: 'Or is this an altogether absurd and literal-minded, fleshly, train of thought and conjecture?' In the subsequent sentences, he elaborates extensively on his spiritual interpretation of the 'language of God'. On this spiritual reading, the Word of God from the preface to the Gospel of John—that is the Son, the second person of Trinity—is co-eternal to God the Father. Consequently, God's 'words' are incorporeal and eternal, and thus cannot be identified with the words of any human language—either Hebrew or another language—since these are corporeal and temporal. Likewise, when dealing in *De trinitate* 2.10.18 (cf. *De Genesi ad litteram libri duodecim* 8.27.49–50) with the fact that God is reported in Genesis to have spoken to Adam, he concludes that 'it is not easy to decide what sort of speech God used to make himself heard in those times by men's physical ears'.

The question of God's language and the spiritual interpretation of this matter are thematized over and again in Augustine's works. Both in *In Iohannis euangelium tractatus* 14.7 and in *De Genesi contra Manichaeos* 1.9.15, Augustine rhetorically asks whether the language used by God in Creation was Hebrew, Greek, Latin, or some other language. In the former passage, he replies that 'languages are necessary where you have distinct peoples (*ubi distinctio gentium*)', but nobody can say that God spoke in this language or that'. In the latter passage, he objects that 'with God there is just sheer understanding (*purus intellectus*), without any noise and diversity of tongues (*sine strepitu et diuersitate linguarum*)'. In a variety of other passages,³¹ Augustine contrasts the permanent (eternal) and spiritual nature of the 'language of God' to the transient and corporeal nature of human language. As a rule, he tries to characterize the elusive nature of the 'language of God' by showing what it is not, more specifically

³¹ Cf. *De ciuitate Dei* 10.15, 16.6.1; *In Iohannis euangelium tractatus* 40.4–5; *De Genesi ad litteram libri duodecim* 1.10.19–20, 6.8.13; *De Genesi ad litteram imperfectus liber* 5.19; *Enarrationes in Psalmos* 44.6, 103.4.1; *Sermo* 2.6, 47.40; *Confessiones* passim.

by contrasting it to the characteristic properties of human speech. Properties typically mentioned are (1) the human voice and the specific speech organs by which it is produced; (2) the physical sounds (often pejoratively styled *strepitus*) which are nothing more than vibrating air, time-bound and accordingly distinguishable into syllables (cf. Biville 1999); and (3) the variability and diversity of human language(s) (Sect. 4.1, p. 125f.).

Other Spiritual Interpretations of the 'Language of God'

Ambrosiaster's and (probably) Jerome's identification of the primeval language—Hebrew, in their opinion—as the 'language of God' (cf. above, p. 87f.) remained remarkably unsequential among Christian Latin authors subsequent to them. Generally, authors belonging to the periods both before and after Augustine tend to conceive of the 'language of God' in a spiritual way, even when 'inner-Trinitarian' forms of communication are left out of consideration.³² Such a spiritual interpretation of the 'language of God' seems to be put forward by Ambrose in *Exameron* 1.9.33, where the author explains that when God is reported to 'speak', He should not be understood to speak in a human way. Ambrose presents God's speech as a spiritual process, writing that God spoke 'in such a way, that he revealed the knowledge of His will through the execution of His beneficence'. While Ambrose does not positively define God's language, it is very clear how it should, in his opinion, *not* be understood. By contrast to human language, God's speech lacks physical sounds which reverberate the air, and neither is it produced by any vocal organs or by a motion of the tongue. On this line of interpretation, human speech merely serves as an inevitable allegory by which humans can try to understand the immaterial way in which God 'speaks'.

As can be expected, spiritual interpretations of the 'language of God' also occur in works written during the ages subsequent upon Augustine, due pre-

³² Arnobius the Elder in the anti-pagan polemic of *Aduersus nationes* 3.18 already used a *reductio ad absurdum* in order to refute the corporeal interpretation of the 'language of God'. If one believes that God sees in the same way as humans do, he argues, one should also assume that He has the same necessary organs as humans have—and this is an absurd idea. The same applies to the capacities of hearing and speech (*de eloquii forma et uerborum prolatione*). If one believes that God speaks in the same way as humans do, one should also assume that God has a mouth, lips, and teeth, 'by the striking and mobility of which the manifold tongue articulates sounds (*multiuuga lingua sonos articulet*) and fashions the voice into words (*et uocem in uerba conformet*)'. The ironical use of characteristics of human speech shows that in Arnobius' opinion, the 'language of God' should be understood in an incorporeal, spiritual way.

cisely to the authority of the latter's statements on the issue (cf. above, p. 88f.). Indirect evidence can be found in Paulinus of Nola's *Ep. 45.7*, a letter addressed to Augustine (!) which is actually concerned with the question of resurrection. Paulinus argues that 'the voice of God (*vox Dei*), often issuing from a cloud to holy men, shows that there can be utterance without a tongue (*posse loquelas esse sine lingua*)', a statement which seems to imply a spiritual interpretation.

Gregory the Great provides a sophisticated spiritual interpretation of God's language or, more generally, of 'divine speech' in *Moralia in Job* 28.1.1–10, which contains his commentary on the verse *Respondens autem Dominus Iob de turbine dixit* (Job 38:1) (cf. Dekker 2005: 349–350). He expounds that 'divine speech (*locutio diuina*) falls into two modes (*in duobus modis ... distinguitur*)'. Either God speaks 'through Himself' or 'on His own' (*per semetipsum*), or he does so 'by mediation of an angelic creature' (*per creaturam angelicam*). Gregory furthermore explains that when God 'speaks' *per semetipsum*, this divine speech is to be understood in a purely spiritual way. In this case, God 'is revealed to us by the mere virtue of internal inspiration' (*sola nobis ui internae inspirationis aperitur*), and 'our heart is taught about His Word without words and syllables' (*de uerbo eius sine uerbis ac syllabis cor docetur*). Somewhat further, Gregory insists that divine speech proceeds 'without relying on the noise and slowness of speech' (*non adhibito strepitu et tarditate sermonis*). It is clear that in Gregory's opinion, too, the language of God should be understood in terms precisely opposite to human language. In addition, the substance and phrasing of this passage are strongly reminiscent of Augustine's expositions on the issue.

In *Moralia in Job* 30.5.20 Gregory explicitly contrasts human, external speech to divine, internal speech. He writes that when God addresses men, it is 'silently resounding' (*silenter sonans*) that His 'invisible tongue of remorse (*inuisibilis lingua compunctionis*) says this to them inwardly (*intrinsecus*)'. He furthermore states that all the more perfectly people 'are averted from the noise of external desires (*ab exteriorum desideriorum strepitu*)', the more fully they 'internally (*intus*) hear' the words of God. Interestingly, external speech is qualified by the pejorative term *strepitus* and associated with (carnal) desires, thus made by far inferior to God's silent speech.

'Adaptive' Interpretations of the 'Language of God'

A number of authors do not hold that God has a single language of his own, but argue that God adapts his ways of communication to the human(s) he is addressing. It should be noted that this is in fact nothing but a more elaborate version of the standard spiritual interpretation of the 'language of God'. A first proponent of this interpretation is Hilary of Poitiers, who states in *Tractatus super Psalmos* 126.6 that 'divine speech (*sermo ... diuinus*) adapts itself

(*se temperat*) to the usage and nature of our understanding', thus implying that God has no actual language of His own. Likewise, Filastrius in *Diuersarum hereseon liber* 138.1–2 paraphrases a particular group of heretics who ask the critical question as to 'why God did not always speak in a single way, but instead preached to the human race in various ways and various languages'. Filastrius replies that this is so because God spoke and appeared to humans 'according to the capacity of humans who see and who process seeing and hearing' (*secundum capacitatem hominum uidentium atque capientium uidere atque audire*). He furthermore specifies that when man was thrown out of paradise and was made mortal, God did no longer adapt his ways of communication to human perception but instead 'spoke from heaven, His own voice being heard and preserved (*uoce ipsius audita atque ea custodita*)'. With the lapse of time, furthermore, God again began to show Himself to men, e.g. to Abraham.

The same line of thought can be inferred from Faustus of Riez' *Ep. 3* (CSEL 21: 172), where the author argues that God adapts himself to humans when addressing them and thus also adopts human language. He elaborates on this point by comparing God to a (fictitious) priest with a competence in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin, who is thus able to preach to people of different nations, to each in their own language. In the same way as the multilingual priest switches languages in accordance with the language of his addressee, God, when He wants to speak to a human, assumes the language of that human, in order to address him with sounds that he is able to understand. A similar interpretation can lastly be found in Isidore's *Etym. 9.1.11* (Hilhorst 2007: 780), a passage which draws heavily on Augustine's *De Genesi ad litteram libri duodecim* 1.2.5 (cf. above, p. 89). Isidore follows the Augustinian line of interpretation by refusing to identify Hebrew or any other language as the 'language of God'. He states that 'it is hard to determine what sort of language God spoke' in Creation and when addressing Adam, the prophets, and the second person of Trinity. Isidore refers to the opinion held by some, namely that the language used by God was 'that single one which existed prior to the diversity of tongues', that is, the primeval language. He does not accept this opinion but, interestingly, does not follow Augustine's strictly spiritual interpretation either. Instead, he takes an 'adaptive' stance by arguing that 'in the various nations it is believed that God speaks to them in the same language that the people use themselves (*eadem lingua ... quam ipsi homines utuntur*)', so that He may be understood by them'. Rather than involving a skeptic, relativist critique on the anthropomorphic character of God—which would be in line with the objections made by the Greek philosopher Xenophanes (c.570–460 BC)—Isidore's statement probably represents a condensed version of the 'adaptive' interpretation of the 'language of God'.

Summary

This chapter aimed to investigate early Christian Latin authors' views on the 'primeval situation' in language history, that is, the period stretching from Creation to the events of Babel. I have pointed out at the beginning of this chapter that the (canonical) biblical coordinates for this question are vague and limited in number, and I have termed this biblical frame of reference the 'minimal view'. In the first section of this chapter, I have shown that none of the authors argue against the minimal view involved by the biblical account. This would have been problematic in an intellectual framework where the Bible was read as a divinely inspired 'true story'. Moreover, I have shown that some of the authors strictly limit themselves to the minimal view when discussing the primeval situation in language history and thus simply hold that there was only one language initially. This vagueness might be explained by a concern for orthodoxy, but in many cases it is also possible that the authors did not consider it relevant or worthwhile to discuss the question in further detail.

The second section dealt with the different possible connections which the authors posit between the primeval language and post-Babelic Hebrew, a connection which goes back to Jewish and/or apocryphal traditions—in particular the Hellenistic-Jewish book of Jubilees—and which entered the Latin Christian tradition by way of Greek Christian authors, most importantly Origen. In Latin Christian literature, we see that the notion of a connection between the primeval language and Hebrew is present in Filastrius, who suggests that 'Hebrew' was named so after Heber. Filastrius' rough contemporary Ambrosiaster clearly states that post-Babelic Hebrew is identical to the primeval language and, more precisely, that the nameless primeval language ceased to exist at Babel, but was restituted by God to Abraham and named 'Hebrew' (*Habraela*) after him. In order to account for this remarkable argument, it has been stressed that Ambrosiaster had an unusual familiarity with Jewish traditions in general and with the book of Jubilees in particular. Jerome, another author with an exceptional knowledge of *Iudaica*, has a less sophisticated understanding than Ambrosiaster of the relation between the primeval language and Hebrew, simply positing as he does an identity between the two, and stating that 'Hebrew' is derived from Heber.

The most sophisticated, coherent, and influential reconstruction of the primeval situation in language history was proposed by Augustine in book 16 of his *De civitate Dei*. Augustine knew the relevant discussions by Filastrius, Ambrosiaster and Jerome, and the obscurity of the former two and the utter succinctness of the latter one are probably not foreign to Augustine's desire to develop a clear-cut, 'canonical' model of language history. It has been shown

that possibly, Augustine initially adopted the Abraham eponymy for ‘Hebrew’ from Ambrosiaster’s works—which may have enjoyed a considerable impact in contemporary intellectual life—but gradually moved towards the Heber eponymy which is central to his exposition in *De ciuitate Dei*. Augustine states that the primeval language had no name (cf. [Filastrius and] Ambrosiaster), that it gave rise to various languages (71) during the events of Babel (Sect. 3.3, p. 110f.) but that it persisted next to these as ‘Hebrew’, named so after Heber, during whose lifetime the events of Babel took place. Augustine’s choice for the Heber eponymy certainly relates to the inner architecture of his model of language history (continuity), but is possibly also motivated by Jerome’s growing authority with regard to Hebrew matters.

Within the second section, it has lastly been shown that Augustine’s model was simplified and codified by Quodvultdeus, Claudio Marius Victorius, Cassiodorus, Jordanes, and definitively by Isidore. These authors omit the distinction between a nameless primeval language and post-Babelic Hebrew and simply hold that Hebrew *is* the primeval language, named so after Heber. By contrast to the Greek and Syriac Christian traditions, there are no early Christian Latin authors at all who argue that the primeval language should be taken to be a language different from Hebrew. Throughout the second section, I have insisted on the connections between the authors’ divergent views on language history. In my view, the multitude of clues and ‘loose ends’ in the authors’ expositions indicates that the contemporary debate on matters of language history may have been even more lively and differentiated than can be positively gathered from the textual evidence that has been preserved.

The third and last section was concerned with the questions whether early Christian Latin authors explicitly identify the primeval language as the ‘language of Adam’ and as the ‘language of God’. Both notions are in fact trivial, since the primeval language is bound to be the language used by God and Adam in the account of Genesis, but neither of them is explicitly stated in the canonical Bible books. Both notions are explicitly stated, however, in the book of Jubilees and are also evidenced in the works of Origen. The notion that the primeval language was also the language used by Adam can be inferred from Filastrius’ works and is explicitly stated by Ambrosiaster, Augustine, and Isidore. The identification of the primeval language as the language of God is even rarer in Christian Latin literature. It is explicitly stated by Ambrosiaster and perhaps implied by Jerome, again the two authors with an unusual acquaintance with *Iudaica*. In this final section I have also dealt with the more general, but certainly related question of how God communicates with humans throughout history (not in Creation). The dominant line of interpretation, certainly from Augustine onwards, is a spiritual one. According to this interpre-

tation, the language of God cannot possibly be identified with any human language and can only be understood as the exact opposite of material, human language. A last possible line of interpretation has been termed 'adaptive'. On this line of thought, God simply uses the language of the human He wants to address. This is in fact only a more sophisticated version of the 'spiritual' interpretation.

The Origin of Linguistic Diversity

It has been pointed out in the Introduction (p. 10) that the rise of Christianity considerably altered and arguably even widened the linguistic horizon of Western intellectuals. One way in which early Christian Latin authors could try to come to grips with this complicated and diversified linguistic reality (cf. Pohl 1998: 22–24) was to connect it to the Babel narrative of Gen. 11, which the authors read as a ‘true story’ explaining how linguistic diversity had come about (cf. Swiggers 1999; Trabant 2006: 20–21).¹ There are no early Christian Latin authors who contradict the identification of the origin of language diversity as the events of Babel.² Some of the crucial issues relating to this explanatory strategy will provide the subject matter for the present chapter. In this way,

¹ In the English Standard Version, the Babel narrative reads as follows: ‘Now the whole earth had one language and the same words. And as people migrated from the East, they found a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. And they said to one another, ‘Come, let us make bricks, and burn them thoroughly.’ And they had brick for stone, and bitumen for mortar. Then they said, ‘Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be dispersed over the face of the whole earth.’ And the Lord came down to see the city and the tower, which the children of man had built. And the Lord said, ‘Behold, they are one people, and they have all one language, and this is only the beginning of what they will do. And nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. Come, let us go down and there confuse their language, so that they may not understand one another’s speech.’ So the Lord dispersed them from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city. Therefore its name was called Babel, because there the Lord confused the language of all the earth. And from there the Lord dispersed them over the face of all the earth.’

² An atypical and rather vague reference to Babel as the origin of language diversity can be found in Rufinus’ translation of the pseudo-Clementine *Recognitiones*, originally written in Greek around the middle of the 4th century. At 1.30.5 the author states that the single primeval language (Hebrew—cf. p. 63) persisted until ‘in the fifteenth generation (*quinta decima generatione*), men for the first time ever erected and worshipped an idol (*primo omnium homines idolum statuentes adorauerunt*)’. As the fifteenth generation from Adam onwards amounts to the lifetime of Heber’s son Peleg, ‘in whose days the earth was divided’ (Gen. 10:25), the version of *Recognitiones* does not involve a departure from the universal identification of Babel as the origin of language diversity. Moreover, as Eskhult (2014: 316) points out (following Uehlinger 1990: 41–47), the notion that an idol was placed on top of the tower of Babel in order to wage war against God is evidenced in Targumic interpretations of the Babel narrative.

this chapter builds logically on the two previous ones, which were concerned with the origin and nature of language generally, and with the linguistic situation prior to the events of Babel. Also, the ‘biblical-mythological’ perspective discussed in this chapter is only one possible strategy by which early Christian Latin authors could come to grips with linguistic diversity. Subsequent chapters will turn to an ‘attitudinal’ and a ‘descriptive-classificatory’ perspective.

As was also indicated at the beginning of Chapter 2, much of the relevant source material has already been discussed in the wide-ranging and useful studies by Borst (1958) and Eskhult (2013, 2014). In the present chapter, too, I will try to contribute to a better and fuller understanding of early Christian Latin authors’ views on the issue by approaching the subject matter in a systematic and comparative way. A basic methodological notion is that the well-known biblical narrative of Gen. 11 is actually very concise and relatively vague, incomplete or inconsistent (Sherman 2013; cf. Denecker 2014b). This general vagueness gave (Jewish and) Christian exegetes the opportunity, or sometimes even compelled them, to ‘rewrite’ the Babel narrative to a certain extent using a number of ‘adaptive strategies’, more specifically by adding, rearranging, or possibly omitting certain bits of information. As to the present chapter, it will successively be asked (1) whether and how the authors try to solve the discrepancy between Gen. 10 and 11; (2) how they interpret and evaluate God’s intervention at Babel, the event actually giving rise to linguistic diversity; and (3) precisely how they conceive of the process of linguistic differentiation that took place at Babel. Each of these research questions will be further specified and contextualized at the beginning of the corresponding sections.

1 The Discrepancy between Gen. 10 and 11

Throughout history, biblical exegetes have been disconcerted by the conspicuous discrepancy between the narratives of Gen. 10 and 11 respectively. It is indeed hard to see how the earth may have been ‘of one tongue’ before the tower of Babel was built (Gen. 11:1), while it was said in the previous chapter of Genesis that after the Flood, the descendants of Noah were divided ‘each of them according to his tongue’ (*unusquisque secundum linguam*, Gen. 10:5) (cf. e.g. Barański 1989: 209; Eco 1995: 9; Sherman 2013: 104). One way of dealing with the discrepancy between Gen. 10 and 11 is by keeping entirely silent about it. This seems to be the strategy followed by the majority of early Christian Latin authors. The most obvious explanation for this omission is the authors’ awareness that the discrepancy constitutes a threat to the trustworthiness of the

biblical account, and that highlighting the discrepancy might even constitute a threat to their own orthodoxy (cf. below on the group of heretics discussed by Filastrius). A good example of this ‘silent’ strategy is the early-5th-century poet Cyprianus Gallus, who in his *Heptateuchos* 1 first provides a poetical version of Gen. 10 (1.10.366–386) and, thereupon, of Gen. 11 (1.11.387–402). Cyprianus simply follows the biblical model by juxtaposing Gen. 10 and 11 in a seemingly unproblematic way.

*The Ethnic Reunion in Liber antiquitatum biblicarum, and the
Exegetic Potential of a Heretical Viewpoint in Filastrius*

Nevertheless, the discrepancy between Gen. 10 and 11 is explicitly dealt with by a number of authors, and in a variety of ways. Prior to the Latin tradition, an interesting solution can be found in the pseudo-Philonian *Liber antiquitatum biblicarum*, a pseudepigraphic version of the Old Testament, originally written in Hebrew but only surviving ‘in what many argue is a Latin translation of a Greek translation of the Hebrew’ (Sherman 2013: 122). At 6.1 the author resolves the difficulty by having the nations of Gen. 10:5 reunite, migrate from the East, and settle in the land of Babylon: ‘The inhabitants of the earth who had all been divided subsequently reunited and lived together’. As such, they now constitute the single nation which is about to construct the tower of Babel (cf. Sherman 2013: 128).

The first discussion of the issue in the Latin tradition can be found in the works of Filastrius. One of the heresies refuted by Filastrius, namely in *Diversarum hereseon liber* 104, is rooted exactly in the discrepancy between Gen. 10 and 11. Filastrius in §1 presents the heterodox stance as the ‘heresy, which disputes about the language and the languages (*quae de lingua et linguis ambigit*), for the Bible speaks both of ‘one language’ [Gen. 11:1] and of ‘languages’ [Gen. 10:5] (*cum scriptura dicat et unam linguam et linguas*)’. The solution to this discrepancy proposed by the heresy in point involves that due to a demographic growth during the long period stretching from Adam to Heber, linguistic diversity existed already before Babel. However, men at that time possessed an ‘angelic grace’, a kind of ‘unnatural’ multilingual competence (*habentes ... angelicam gratiam, id est multarum linguarum scientiam*), by which they were able to overcome the diversity of languages (§ 3; Sect. 6.1, p. 199). What men lost when building the tower of Babel was, according to the heretics, not their common primeval language—which was already lost—but their ‘angelic grace’. It was only at this point that linguistic diversity became a real obstacle to human communication (§§ 2 and 4).

Without actually subscribing to this heterodox point of view—contrary to what Borst (1958: 381–382) and Klein (1999: 27) seem to believe—Filastrius

acknowledges its exegetic potential with regard to the discrepancy between Gen. 10 and 11, writing in §1 that

if there was one language before (*si ergo erat una ante*), because there were few people (*quia pauci erant*), and if there were many languages afterwards (*sive postea multae*), because the number of people being born in the world had already grown numerous (*quia multi creuerant iam nati homines in saeculo*), it is not that pointless to reason so about it (*non est adeo inutile hoc ita sentire*).

It should be granted that Filastrius' phrasing and, concomitantly, his precise position with regard to the heretics he is refuting, are far less clear than one would wish. When Borst and Klein attribute the refuted views to Filastrius himself, this is representative of a broader problem with regard to Filastrius' expositions and their reception. As was already indicated in Sect. 2.2 (p. 77), Filastrius' ambiguous position *vis-à-vis* the heretics he refutes was probably one of the incentives for Augustine to propose his own, 'canonical' model of language history. Nevertheless, it is very unlikely in my opinion that Filastrius actually subscribed to the exegetic point of view which he paraphrases in this chapter. The work in which it is inserted is a catalogue of *heresies* after all.

Augustine's Rearrangement of the Narrative: recapitulatio

A remarkable case in point is the solution proposed by Augustine,³ who attaches great importance to the internal logic of Gen. 10 and 11, evidently owing to his will to vindicate the coherence and historical accuracy of the biblical narrative. On a number of occasions throughout his works, Augustine presents the apparent discrepancy between Gen. 10 and 11 as a textbook example of *recapitulatio*, or narrative inversion. This *recapitulatio* is in fact a slightly reinterpreted version of the sixth out of seven *regulae* or exegetic devices, which is posited in the following words by the Donatist Tyconius in his *Liber regularum* 6.1:⁴

Among the rules with which the Spirit has sealed the law so as to guard the pathway of light, the seal of recapitulation (*recapitulationis sigillum*) guards some things with such subtlety that it seems more a continuation

³ Cursory references to Babel as the origin of linguistic diversity can be found in Augustine's *Enarrationes in Psalmos* 54.12, 54.15, *De Genesi contra Manichaeos* 1.23–36, and *Quaestiones in Heptateuchum* 1.20.

⁴ On Tyconius and his *Liber regularum*, cf. Bright (1988), Pollmann (1996: 32–65), and Fredriksen (1999). For a translation, cf. Babcock (1989).

than a recapitulation of the narrative (*ut continuatio magis narrationis quam recapitulatio uideatur*).

In other words, *recapitulatio* according to Tyconius' definition is a kind of discrepancy between narration time and narrated time, consisting more precisely in a return in the events described which is not formally indicated in the narrative itself. In *De doctrina Christiana* 3.36.52 Augustine rephrases the rule as follows:⁵ 'Some passages are presented as if their contents follow in chronological order or in a continuous sequence, when in fact the narrative covertly switches back to earlier matters which had been passed over'. In other words, the linearity of the narrative conceals a return in the events described. While the narrative sequence is a–b, the historical sequence is b–a. In the specific case of Gen. 10 and 11, this means that the historical events narrated in Gen. 11 (the events of Babel) predate those narrated in Gen. 10 (the 'Table of Nations'). While hinting at this narrative intervention both in *Quaestiones in Heptateuchum* 1.20 and in *De ciuitate Dei* 16.4 and (concisely) 16.15.1,⁶ Augustine offers his plainest exposition of it in *De doctrina Christiana* 3.36.53. Because of Augustine's explicit 'problematisierung' of and solution to the inconsistency between Gen. 10 and 11, the passage seems worth quoting in full. In Augustine's opinion, the information given in Gen. 11:1, that 'the world was of one tongue and of the same speech',

is clearly inconsistent with the previous words (*repugnat superioribus uerbis*) 'by their tribes and according to their languages' (Gen. 10:5). Single tribes which had formed single races cannot be said to have had their own languages at a time when there was a single language common to all. Therefore the words 'and every land had a single language, and all had one voice' are added by recapitulation (*per hoc recapitulando adiunctum est*), with the narrative covertly turning back on itself (*latenter narratione redeunte*), in order to explain how it happened that after having a single common language they were divided among many. Immediately after this comes the story of the construction of the tower.

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- 5 On the hermeneutical connections and divergences between Tyconius and Augustine in general, and on Augustine's integration of Tyconius' device of *recapitulatio* in particular, cf. Cazier (1973), Steinhauser (1984), Dulaey (1989), Kannengiesser & Bright (1989), and Pollmann (1996: 196–215 [205–211]).
- 6 The relevant passage in *De ciuitate Dei* 16.4 reads as follows: *Cum ergo in suis linguis istae gentes fuisse referantur, reddit tamen narrator ad illud tempus, quando una lingua omnium fuit, et inde iam exponit, quid acciderit, ut linguarum diuersitas nasceretur.*

Augustine thus applies an established exegetical rule in order to expose an alleged narrative twist in the biblical text itself. According to his explanation, the events of Gen. 11 historically preceded those of Gen. 10, although they are described the other way round in the biblical narrative. In this way, Augustine is able to resolve the contradiction between both pericopes without having to challenge the authority of the biblical account. Isidore in *Sententiae* 1.19.16–17 literally quotes Augustine's *De ciuitate Dei* 16.15.1 and in doing so adopts the strategy of *recapitulatio*. The strategy is also frequently mentioned in Eugippius' compilation of Augustine's works.

The Rearrangements Proposed by Sulpicius Severus and by Claudius Marius Victorius

A comparable though not identical strategy is followed by Augustine's contemporary Sulpicius Severus, who in *Chronica* 1.4.4–6 alters the order of events and as it were 'includes' the differentiation described in Gen. 10 into the account of Gen. 11.⁷ In a first step, Sulpicius Severus accepts an ethnic differentiation before Babel, but denies a concomitant linguistic differentiation. In spite of the criterion *secundum linguam* at Gen. 10:5 (cf. Gen. 10:20, 10:31), he writes that although men had multiplied and inhabited different places and islands, 'nevertheless all made use of one tongue (*una tamen omnes lingua utebantur*)', until the multitude, afterwards to be scattered through the whole world, came together in one place.⁸ Sulpicius Severus subsequently 'inserts' the ethnic differentiation of Gen. 10 into the events of Gen. 11, stating that due to the Babelic division of languages, the tower-builders became dispersed all the more easily, 'because, regarding each other as foreigners, they were easily induced to separate'. In this way it came about, Sulpicius Severus concludes, that the world was divided among the sons of Noah, Sem occupying the East, Japhet the West, and Ham the parts in between. It is important to note that Sulpicius Severus reorganizes the information of Gen. 10 and 11, but does not explicitly problematize—as Augustine does—the discrepancy between both passages or his strategy to counter this discrepancy. Sulpicius Severus completed his chronicle in 404, while the first three books of Augustine's *De doctrina Christiana* date to 396/397. Although Augustine's and Sulpicius Severus' strategies are not identical, an Augustinian influence in the *Chronica* thus cannot be excluded.

⁷ Cf. Weber (1997) for a general study of the *Chronica*.

⁸ The same strategy is implicit in Prosper of Aquitaine's statement (*De uocatione omnium gentium* 2.14 [PL 51: 699B]) that God intervened at Babel by throwing into confusion 'the one language of those nations (*unam illorum populorum loqueland*) with its meanings commonly known among them'.

A comparable rearrangement of the narrative is implemented by Claudio Marius Victorius in *Alethia* 3.210–215, which is part of what Martorelli (2008: 145; tr. mine) calls a ‘free evocation of the events of Babel’. When broaching the events of Babel, Victorius acknowledges to return to his principal matter, namely the ‘series of fathers’ of Gen. 10, from which he states to have diverged previously. He subsequently describes how Noah’s progeny had strongly increased, how the Eastern lands had become satiated, and how ‘the youth that was to spread over various parts of the earth burst into complaints’—thus starting to retell the Babel narrative. Victorius almost unnoticeably ‘merges’ or ‘blends’ the events of Babel described in Gen. 11 with the genealogical account of Gen. 10, by stating that his paraphrase of the Babel narrative involves a return to the ‘series of fathers’ of Gen. 10.⁹

2 Evaluations of God’s Intervention

While the Bible presents God’s intervention at Babel in rather vague terms, by simply featuring God in direct speech (Gen. 11:5–7), early Christian Latin authors characterize the nature of God’s intervention in a number of different ways. It seems relevant to discuss the various evaluations of God’s reaction as described in the Bible, since these evaluations of course bear upon the authors’ respective appraisals of linguistic diversity in itself (Ch. 4). Whereas it is in fact only implied by the internal logic of the Babel narrative that God’s intervention is an act ‘against’ mankind, early Christian Latin authors often follow the adaptive strategy of adding to the biblical material and, in this way, specifying it. These authors’ interpretations of God’s intervention can be classified in a pessimistic and an optimistic category—although it must be emphasized that the authors often perceive of these categories as ‘two sides of the same coin’. Apart from these two categories, several early Christian Latin authors stay close to the biblical account and correspondingly describe God’s intervention in a rather neutral and objective (or vague) way. When God intervened at Babel by giving rise to language diversity, these authors seem to assume, this was just a means to prevent the tower-builders from completing their presumptuous project—although even this may remain unstated.¹⁰ These authors’ vagueness

⁹ In later times, too, authors like (pseudo-)Bede and Dante Alighieri will handle the discrepancy between Gen. 10 and 11 by reorganizing the narrated events; cf. Barański (1989: 209) and Tavoni (1987: 435–439).

¹⁰ Passages which I have identified as ‘neutral’ descriptions of God’s intervention are Tertul-

with regard to the nature of God's intervention may again be understood as a 'safe' strategy and/or as indicating their lack of interest in specifics of language history.

Pessimistic Voices: Punishment, Revenge

A pessimistic evaluation of God's intervention, presenting the origin of language diversity as a punishment or retaliation executed by God, seems to prevail among the authors included in the text corpus. This can certainly be explained with reference to the internal logic of the biblical narrative, which does not explicitly state, but indeed strongly suggests or even urges this interpretation. The author of the pseudo-Philonian *Liber antiquitatum bibliarum* (originally written in Hebrew) chooses a rather careful phrasing when writing at 32.1, a passage subsequent upon the account of Babel: 'Behold, the Lord reveals his glory to us from heaven, as he previously did when he sent out his voice to confuse the languages of men'. Hilary of Poitiers is somewhat more explicit in *Tractatus super Psalmos* 54.11. In his presentation, the confusion of languages separated the builders 'with a view to causing an eternal feud among them, lest they would carry on the conspiracy they had plotted against God'. He subsequently writes that in the psalm he is commenting upon (Ps. 54), 'quite a similar punishment (*non dispar ... poena*) is now demanded' for the psalmist's rivals.¹¹

In Jerome's *Ep. 18A.6.7* it is not explicitly stated, but implied by the phrasing that linguistic diversity was 'imposed' (*attributa est*), that God's reaction should be considered a punishment (but cf. *infra*). This point of view is expressed far more explicitly by Rufinus, who writes in *Expositio symboli* 2 that the Babelites, who 'built a tower of arrogance, were deservedly (*merito*) condemned to accept a confusion of languages (*linguarum confusione damnati*

lian, *Aduersus Praxeian* 16.2; Hilary of Poitiers, *Tractatus super Psalmos* 136.13; Ambrose, *Expositio euangeli secundum Lucam* 10.69; pseudo-Ambrose, *Sermo* 36.2; Commodian, *Carmen apologeticum aduersus Iudaeos et gentes* 164–170; Sulpicius Severus, *Chronica* 1.4.4; Quodvultdeus, *Liber promissionum et praedictorum Dei* 1.8.14 (who simply quotes the relevant Bible verses); Cyprianus Gallus, *Heptateuchos* 1.11.387–402; Avitus of Vienne, *Poemata* 4.113–132; Helpidius Rusticus, *Historiarum testamenti ueteris et noui tristicha* 7; Verecundus of Iunca, *Commentarii super cantica ecclesiastica* Deut. 9; Jordanes, *Romana* 9; Gregory of Tours, *Historiae* 1.6; Gregory the Great, *Moralia in Job* 14.53.65, *Homiliae in euangelia* 2.30.4; Arator, *Historia apostolica* 1.3.129–134.

¹¹ Another interesting exegetic connection can be found in *Tractatus super Psalmos* 136.5, where Hilary opposes Sion/Jerusalem, the *civitas sancta*, to Babylon, the *civitas confusioneis* characterized by the turmoil of vices, inclinations and desires which are proper to fallen mankind.

sunt uti'. Likewise, Augustine in *De ciuitate Dei* 16.4 unambiguously presents the Babelic confusion of languages as God's punishment for human arrogance. He reminds his readers that the tower which Nimrod began to build with his nations symbolized his 'ungodly pride', and argues that

it is only right that a wicked intention should be punished (*merito malus punitur affectus*), even when it is not successfully carried out. What kind of punishment was imposed, then? Because the power of a ruler lies in his tongue (*dominatio imperantis in lingua est*), it was there that Nimrod's pride was condemned, so that he who refused to understand and obey God's bidding was himself not understood when he gave his bidding to men.

Further on in the same work, at 16.11.1, Augustine refers to the period 'when the nations received the punishment (*punitae ... sunt*) which their ungodly presumption deserved (*merito elatioris impietatis*) and were divided by the diversity of languages', and succinctly states that 'that multiplication and change of languages (*multiplicatio mutatioque linguarum*) came about as a punishment (*de poena uenit*)'. These pessimistic appraisals of the origin of language diversity are closely paralleled in *Quaestiones in Heptateuchum* 1.21 and *In Iohannis euangelium tractatus* 6.10. Augustine's fundamentally pessimistic appraisal of God's intervention agrees with his global evaluation of language diversity as a consequence of human sin, namely pride (*superbia*), which in its turn results from the Fall (cf. *De doctrina Christiana* 2.4–5; Jackson 1969: 27; Rist 1994: 37).

Prosper of Aquitaine in *De uocatione omnium gentium* 2.14 (PL 51: 699B) rhetorically pictures God in his quality of supreme judge, inflicting his punishment on the arrogant tower-builders: 'how wonderful was then the stricture of God's justice (*diuinae censura iustitiae*) to stop their insolence! The one common language ... He threw into confusion ... so as to foil the contrivance of their mad undertaking'. In an anonymous *praefatio* of unknown date, which has been connected to a sermon of Leo the Great (cf. Moeller on Callewaert in CCSL 161B: 198), the confusion of languages is referred to as 'that judgment (*sententia*) which the construction of the arrogant tower once deserved (*meruit*)'. Fulgentius the mythographer in *De aetatibus mundi et hominis* 3.11–12 straightforwardly presents God's intervention as a punishment, almost as an act of revenge. He writes that the Babelic confusion of languages 'destroyed the central purpose of what had been undertaken', and exclaims: 'What a mighty and inestimable judgment (*sententia*) on the part of God!' He furthermore argues that the more humanity rejoiced in the construction of the tower, 'all the more readily God destroyed it, mocking men's vain ambition (*qui uanos*

*hominum impetus deridebat'). This qualification of God's intervention in terms of mockery and Schadenfreude is quite exceptional. Lastly, Cassiodorus in *Expositio Psalmorum* 54.10 states that while God 'mercifully' (*propitius*) united the tongues during the events of Pentecost (Sect. 6.2, p. 203), it was 'in anger' (*iratus*) that He divided them at Babel.*

Optimistic Voices: Clemency and Salvatory Pedagogy

Remarkably, isolated optimistic positions can be found in the works of Jerome and of Augustine, both of whom generally evaluate God's intervention in a pessimistic way in different contexts (cf. above). Jerome in *Commentarii in prophetas minores* Mich. 2.7.8/13 (CCSL 76: 518) states with reference to the origin of linguistic diversity that 'it is wholesome (*prodest*) that the worst powers do not have concord among them'. Again at Hab. 2.3.14/16 (CCSL 76A: 645) he argues that by the division of languages, 'a very bad treaty was torn to pieces by a useful division (*utili diuisione*)'. Rather than a mere punishment for mankind, God's intervention at Babel was also a way of protecting mankind against itself. The optimistic element is more evident in the case of Augustine. In *Enarrationes in Psalmos* 54.11 he includes the events of Babel (and of Pentecost, Sect. 6.2, p. 201f.) in his exegesis of the verse *Submerge, Domine, et diuide linguas eorum*, where the psalmist implores God's revenge over his slanderers. Augustine argues that if people 'have conspired in wickedness, it is for their good (*expedit eis*) that they lose their comprehension of each other's languages'. Whereas people with good intentions should have a common language, people with bad intentions should 'find their languages diversified, so that they cannot understand each other'. Augustine then refers to the events of Babel, where the Babelites' unanimity turned into an arrogant conspiracy, and states that 'God dealt mercifully with them (*pepercit illis Deus*) by estranging their tongues, to make it impossible for them to form a dangerous unity by understanding each other'.

Straightforward optimistic readings of God's intervention appear to be more frequent in texts dating to the period following upon Augustine, possibly owing to the more intensive doctrinal reflection and debate ensuing on Augustine's teachings on grace and salvation. On this 'pedagogical' line of interpretation, God reacts relatively mildly against the arrogance of mankind in order to prevent it from committing worse sins and in order to remind mankind that it remains dependent for its salvation upon His grace.¹² While explicitly pre-

¹² This 'pedagogical' presentation of God's intervention can be compared to Augustine's argument that God keeps providing the *stimulus carnis* in small portions to humans instead of taking it entirely away, in order to prevent humans from priding themselves in

senting the construction of the tower as an act of arrogance, the author of the *Consultationes Zacchaei et Apollonii* at 1.17.7–8 presents God's intervention as a demonstration of His benignity towards mankind. This is clearly indicated by the phrases *inexplicabilis bonitas Dei, nulli ... eloquenda miserationis, and diuinæ clementiae lenitatem*. The tower-builders, instead of being punished (*non puniuntur*)—something they certainly deserved in the author's opinion—are led away from their crime (*a scelere deducuntur*) due to the confusion of their common language. This presentation implies that linguistic diversity may constitute an inconvenience, but certainly cannot be considered an actual punishment (cf. Sherman 2013: 323–324). The optimistic evaluation of God's intervention should undoubtedly be explained with reference to the apologetic tenor of this fictitious dialogue between a Christian and a pagan. Likewise, John Cassian in *Collationes* 4.12.7 (cf. Borst 1958: 414) argues that with the Babelic confusion of languages—the consequence of which he calls 'a good and beneficial discord'—God intended not so much to punish the tower-builders, but to force them 'to advance to a better state' and to 'call them back to salvation' (*ad salutem reuocasset*), in accordance with His salvatory plan for mankind (*dispensatione Dei*).

Lastly, an elaborate optimistic presentation of God's intervention can be found in Claudius Marius Victorius' *Alethia* (cf. Borst 1958: 414; Martorelli 2008: 145–147; Cutino 2009: 173). God—who is in 3.254–261 featured in an extensive monologue—is on the one hand aware that what men have undertaken are 'difficult things that nature in itself forbids'. Consequently, He decides to 'let them suffer, without a punishment, the damage of so idle an effort' (*impunita ferant tam uani damna laboris*). The character of God's intervention as a punishment is here explicitly denied. On the other hand, however, God at the same time wants to show the tower-builders that 'what is impossible, is also illicit'. When He accordingly decides to bring about linguistic diversity, He does so in order to condemn the sin that the Babelites committed in their concord by means of a 'preferable discord (*melior discordia*) of a confounded language'. In a concluding comment to his rewritten version of the Babel narrative (3.285–298a), Victorius evaluates God's intervention in a more detailed way. In this passage, the author repeatedly designates God's intervention as a punishment, but as a deserved one—it is called *poena nocentum* and *ultio iusta*.¹³ The image of a righteous and benign God is definitely maintained.

their supposed strength against the *concupiscentia carnis*, for which they remain dependent upon God's grace (cf. Partoens 2005: 256–257, with further references).

¹³ Martorelli (2008: 146 n. 184; tr. mine) notes that '*ultio* in the poem always indicates God's just punishment'.

The poet argues moreover that the alleged punishment ‘is not devoid of a sacred gift’ (*nec ... hoc sacri ... muneric est uacuum*).¹⁴ In Victorius’ opinion, God’s intervention is benign in that it prevents mankind from committing a ‘common sin’ (*commune nefas*) already for the second time after his Fall from paradise (cf. the Flood). Whereas only a handful of instigators had actual guilt in the construction of a tower, God’s intervention ‘prevents that what is caused by the guilty persuasion of a few would again contaminate all’. As both Martorelli (2008: 147) and Cutino (2009: 174 n. 89) observe,¹⁵ this is exactly what makes a gift out of God’s punishment. In order to prevent sin from spreading, God wants to resolve the extant family or blood affinity and instead divide mankind into novel ethnolinguistic entities (note the naturalistic baseline in this explanation).¹⁶ Whereas this would normally have been an emotionally uncomfortable operation—it is exactly fear of dispersion that induced the Babelites to construct a tower—God in Victorius’ opinion eased the suffering of mankind by confounding its language. The rise of linguistic diversity produced a ‘loss of identity’ (Cutino 2009: 174 n. 89; tr. mine), causing post-Babelic men to ‘not want to remember’ and even to despise their former cognates, and thus preventing them from missing these cognates.

3 The Degree of Differentiation and the Number of Post-Babelic Languages

An important gap in the narrative of Gen. 11 concerns the question as to what the linguistic situation looked like during the period following upon the events of Babel. For Christian authors, who read the Babel narrative as a ‘true story’ and who tried to reconcile it with the information provided in the Table of Nations of Gen. 10, this question obviously mattered. Accordingly, several authors are seen specifying or adding to the information provided in Gen. 11, in

¹⁴ Cf. *Alethia* 3.289b–290a: *plus est quod praestat alumnis talis poena reis.*

¹⁵ Also cf. Martorelli (2008: 151; tr. mine): ‘the dispersion is a punishment, and nevertheless the example of the birds [Sect. 3.3, p. 113] shows that it constitutes a natural mechanism, necessary to populate the world, and a providential project to which men in their foolishness opposed by constructing the tower’.

¹⁶ This is remarkably analogous to what Atherton (2009: 207–208) writes about the Epicurean view on language origin: ‘... Lucretius’ account of the origins of language, which describes how early humans were beginning to expand their social associations beyond kinship groups, and must, therefore, have been in need of more precise and accurate means of communication than gestures and mumbling’.

order to provide a fuller picture of the situation in language history subsequent to the events of Babel.

It has already been pointed out (p. 58) that whereas all authors either explicitly or implicitly subscribe to a ‘monogenetic’ conception of language origin during the primeval period in language history, they also commonly hold a ‘polygenetic’ view of the second, post-Babelic stage of language origin(s). As to this second stage, I will make a distinction in the present section between a ‘maximal’ and a ‘limited’ conception of linguistic differentiation during the period after Babel. The ‘limited’ differentiation means that authors posit a correspondence of a restricted number of post-Babelic languages to a number of post-Babelic groups of individuals, while the ‘maximal’ differentiation involves a one-to-one correspondence between the different post-Babelic languages and the individuals being scattered at Babel. In the case of a ‘maximal’ differentiation, a subsequent convergence of languages is implied, since the confusion of languages is said, in the Bible, to have given rise to a confusion of ‘nations’, not of individuals (and since a ‘private’ language is problematic in itself). Within the category of ‘limited’ differentiation, I will furthermore look for more refined views on linguistic differentiation, paying attention to those authors who determine a precise number of post-Babelic languages. When authors assuming a ‘limited’ differentiation also posit a definite number of languages, they often, but not exclusively, state that there were (initially) 70 or 72 post-Babelic languages. Both numbers are possible outcomes of calculations based on the ‘Table of Nations’ in Gen. 10, but they also have an important symbolic value which goes back to the Jewish tradition, where these numbers were commonplace in Midrashim and Targumim (Weigand 1942; Borst 1957, 1958; Uehlinger 1990: 51–57; Major 2013).

It is important to note that the ‘maximal’ and the ‘limited’ alternatives have very different implications with regard to how the respective post-Babelic languages are taken to arise or develop. According to the (actually unrealistic) ‘maximal’ view, each individual at once has its own fully developed language, while according to the ‘limited’ conception, languages develop gradually and within a soci(et)al setting. This ‘ontogenetic’ distinction between a ‘maximal’ and a ‘limited’ conception of the development of individual languages obviously has its repercussions on the ‘phylogenetic’ problem of language origin(s) in general (Gera 2003: 166; Sect. 1.1, p. 27f.), but this link is not made explicit by early Christian Latin authors.

Before Augustine: Diverging Viewpoints

In early Latin Christianity prior to Augustine, Filastrius and Pacian both hold a limited view on linguistic differentiation and propose a definite number of

post-Babelic languages. Filastrius states in *Diuersarum hereseon liber* 112.1 that as a consequence of the confusion of languages, the ‘names of the provinces were divided, and so were the seventy-five languages (*septuaginta quinque linguarum*)’. To my knowledge—and cf. Borst (1958: 381–382) and Major (2013: 29–30)—Filastrius is the only early Christian Latin author who believed there were 75 languages in the period immediately after Babel. It should be noted, however, that the number of 75 languages is also mentioned in *Stromata* 1.13.57 by the Greek Christian author Clement of Alexandria (c.150–c.215) (Borst 1957: 232; cf. Thomson forthc.)—there might be a connection between Clement’s mention and Filastrius’ opinion, but the precise nature of this possible connection remains unclear to me. Pacian of Barcelona—who does not explicitly connect the origin of linguistic diversity to the events of Babel—writes in *Ep.* 2.4.3 that God ‘has arranged (*modulatus est*) His language resources (*copiam*) into 120 tongues (*in centum uiginti ora*)’.¹⁷ In the same way as Filastrius is the only early Christian Latin author to maintain that there were 75 languages immediately after Babel, Pacian holds the singular belief that there were 120 languages (cf. Borst 1958: 380–381; Major 2013: 30). Granado, Epitalon & Lestienne (sc 410: 325) note that *cxx* (*centum uiginti*) might be a mistaken reading for *LXX* (*septuaginta*), which would give a more ‘mainstream’ number of human languages. Nevertheless, they maintain the reading *cxx* by analogy with § 4.6 of the same letter, where Pacian asks: *Praeter illas centum et uiginti linguas fuit adhuc alia Musarum?* Although *LXX* would give a more mainstream number of 70 languages, it seems justified to follow Granado, Epitalon & Lestienne in assuming that Pacian actually meant 120 languages.

Jerome, too, proposes a limited view and a definite number of post-Babelic languages. While elucidating in *Commentarii in euangelium Matthaei* 4.26.53–54 the ‘twelve legions of angels’ from Matth. 26:53–54, he makes it plain that a legion counts 6,000 men, and that 12 legions of angels are thus equal to 72,000 angels. To this, Jerome adds the cursory remark that it is ‘in as much nations of men that language was divided’ (*in quot gentes hominum lingua diuisa est*). When read literally, this remark can only imply that according to Jerome, the primeval language was diversified into 72,000 languages, each of them corresponding to an ethnic group. The number of 72,000 languages is very unusual, but Bonnard (sc 259: 262–263 n. 72) compares Jerome’s statement to the Targum of the Pentateuch (add. 27031) Gen. 11.7–8 (sc 245: 143–145),

¹⁷ Pacian is actually defending himself against Simpronian for having quoted a verse from Vergil, viz. *multi praeterea, quos fama obscura recondit* (*Aen.* 5.302); on the controversy, cf. Costanza (1978).

where the number of nations and languages is connected to the number of angels. This line of exegesis would be based, still according to Bonnard, on the Septuagint text of Deut. 32:8, which has it that ‘When the Most High divided the nations ... He set the bounds of the nations according to the number of God’s angels’. Accordingly, Jerome’s reference to the 72,000 nations and languages should probably not be considered a mere inaccuracy due to hasty composition or lack of interest (as Borst does). Although it seems better, therefore, not to conclude with Borst (1958: 390) and Major (2013: 30–31) that Jerome simply meant 72 languages, it should also be emphasized that the precise number of languages may have mattered less to Jerome than the symbolic value of the number 72, whether or not it is multiplied by 1,000, which in itself also has an important symbolic value.

Unlike Filastrius, Pacian, and Jerome, Ambrosiaster in *Quaestiones ueteris et noui testamenti* 108.6 posits a maximal linguistic differentiation at Babel, stating that ‘as many languages then arose as there were people (*quanti et homines fuerunt*), who dispersed over the places where they lived each one for himself established their own languages’. A maximal view can also be identified in the anonymous *Consultationes Zacchaei et Apollonii*. As this work was written around 408/410 and thus cannot have been influenced by book 16 of Augustine’s *De ciuitate Dei* (begun after 412 and completed in or around 419), it should for present purposes be considered ‘pre-Augustinian’. The author states that the confusion of languages gave rise to the various nations of mankind, but nevertheless posits an initial state of maximal linguistic differentiation. He writes at 1.17.9 that ‘their language is diversified into one for each individual (*lingua diuiditur singulorum*), and ... everyone only speaks that language (*hoc tantum unusquisque loquitur*) which he alone understands (*quod solus intellegit*)’. The ‘private’ character of the newly arisen languages is problematic and presupposes a process of posterior convergence. This is indeed what the author seems to indicate by the words *in numerosas, quae nunc per orbem sparsae sunt gentes*.

Augustine: A Sophisticated Conception of the Initial Post-Babelic Situation

Augustine pays considerable attention to the number of post-Babelic languages and nations in his main exposition of language history, which is found in book 16 of *De ciuitate Dei* (Borst 1958: *passim*; Uehlinger 1990: 51–57; Major 2013: 32–34; Eskhult 2014: 335–337). At 16.4 he simply sticks to a limited differentiation, stating that when the ‘conspiracy’ of Babel was resolved through the confusion of languages, ‘each man withdrew from anyone whom he did not understand, and associated only with those to whom he could speak’. He

further specifies his point of view by stating a number of languages at 16.6.2, writing that immediately after Babel

seventy-three (*septuaginta tres*), or rather, as calculation will show (*ut ratio declaratura est*), seventy-two nations and as many languages (*septuaginta duae gentes totidemque linguae*) came into being on earth (*per terras esse coeperunt*).

The calculation which Augustine here announces is based on the ‘Table of Nations’ in Gen. 10 and comes down to the fact that Heber and his son Peleg are taken together as representatives of one nation and language, viz. the Hebrew (Borst 1958: 399–400). By means of this exegetic twist, Augustine fixes the initial number of post-Babelic languages—originating from, and including Hebrew—to 72.¹⁸ However, the number of 72 nations and languages only concerns the ethnolinguistic situation immediately following upon the events of Babel. Augustine subsequently specifies that the nations and languages ‘by their increase (*crescendo*) filled even the islands’. This implies that to Augustine’s mind, the number of nations and languages began to increase relatively soon after Babel, although it is not indicated exactly at which point in time this happened. Augustine then adds another interesting specification:

However, the number of nations (*numerus gentium*) increased much stronger (*auctus est ... multo amplius*) than the number of languages (*quam linguarum*); for in Africa, too (*et in Africa*), we have heard (*nouimus*) of very many barbarous nations/tribes (*barbaras gentes ... plurimas*) which have only one language among them (*in una lingua*).¹⁹

Augustine’s belief that the number of nations increased (and continues to increase) faster than the number of languages—a belief which will be taken up and turned into a crucial methodological principle by Isidore (cf. below, p. 115f.)—implies (1) that the initial number of 72 post-Babelic languages further increases in time, and (2) that different nations use the same language for some time in the course of this process. In order to corroborate his point,

¹⁸ Augustine repeats the belief that there existed 72 languages immediately after Babel in *De ciuitate Dei* 16.9: *Quapropter inter illos tunc hominum populos, qui per septuaginta duas gentes et totidem linguis colliguntur fuisse diuisi, quaeramus, si possumus inuenire, illam in terris peregrinantem ciuitatem Dei.*

¹⁹ For the translation ‘we have heard of’ for *nouimus*, cf. Lengrand (2005: 123–124).

Augustine introduces what is, according to Lepelley (2005a: 31; cf. 2005b: 129), the only reference in the whole of Augustine's works to Libyan or palaeo-Berber, the indigenous language of Africa, namely: *Nam et in Africa barbaras gentes in una lingua plurimas nouimus*.²⁰ Lepelley states that this (presumed) Libyan language cannot be identified with Punic, arguing that Augustine never uses *barbarus* as a qualification for (speakers of) Punic, which he knew considerably better. Furthermore, Lepelley doubts (2005b: 128–129) that the various Libyan tribes spoke exactly the same language and were thus able to understand each other without any trouble, but he suggests that Augustine was acquainted with a certain affinity between the different Libyan/Berber languages or dialects. It will become clear in what follows that the Augustinian number of 72 languages became the default opinion among authors of Latin Christianity.

From Augustine until Isidore

As has already been shown in Sect. 2.2 (p. 83f.), the influence of Augustine's model of language history in subsequent ages was pervasive. When authors active during the period following upon Augustine provide a precise number of languages, they maintain the Augustinian number of 72 languages. They do not necessarily state this number explicitly but they unanimously hold on to a limited differentiation. Augustine's pupil and friend Quodvultdeus in *Liber promissionum et praedictorum Dei* 1.8.14 writes that 'the languages ... now dispersed over the earth created separate nations, each [nation] with its own language (*gentes quasque suo creauere eloquio*)'. This implies a limited view on the linguistic differentiation of Babel, assuming that as many languages arose as there were nations—a notion which goes back to Augustine. Prosper of Aquitaine in *De uocatione omnium gentium* 2.14 (PL 51: 699B) states that at Babel, God 'threw into confusion the one common language which all these people spoke and understood, splitting it up into 72 languages'. Given Prosper's heavy reliance on Augustine's works and views (Borst 1958: 418; Geerlings 2002b), Augustine's *De ciuitate Dei* 16 must no doubt be considered the direct source for this number of post-Babylonian languages (cf. Teske & Weber in CSEL 97: 162). A clear instance of a limited view without a definite number of languages can be found in Claudius Marius Victorius' *Alethia* 3.272–275, which is part of the author's lucid depiction of how the confusion of languages gave rise to the various nations of mankind (cf. above, p. 106f.). The author writes that

²⁰ On Libyan, Punic and Latin in Northern Africa, cf. Millar (1968).

everyone accommodates to whom he understands (*quem quisque intellegit aptat*), and joins that person to himself (*agglomeratque sibi*); the overall affinity perishes, and language defines nation (*gentem lingua facit*); they are dispersed in equal groups and hasten to lands that are scattered over various regions.

In this respect, it is interesting to note that Victorius in 3.276–284 inserts an animal simile which compares the tower-builders to birds. The chaos following upon the confusion of languages is compared to the nervous behaviour of birds during the day, when they mix up with the flocks, in search of food. The birds' behaviour at dusk, furthermore, functions as a parallel to the subsequent emergence of nations on the basis of linguistic convergences. When flying back to their 'leafy dwellings', birds follow the clan to which they belong (*turba uulgas quaeque suum sequitur*). Interestingly, in the light of the author's 'naturalistic' representation of the origin of language diversity (cf. above, p. 106f.), Victorius writes that it is on the basis of colour and voice that birds recognize their congeners (*miscentur, similis qua duxerit aut color aut uox*). Martorelli (2008: 151; tr. mine) notes that 'the *uox* that distinguishes the species of the birds ... demonstrates the naturalness of the new human groups, based on language'. This 'naturalness' of ethnolinguistic group formation may to a certain extent be due to the influence of Lucretius (Ch. 1, p. 26f.), who generally was Victorius' most important model (cf. Martorelli 2008: 200–203). However, here again one should reckon with a powerful (though implicit) influence exerted by Augustine's model of language history.

A limited view on the Babelic differentiation of languages is also implied in Cyprianus Gallus' *Heptateuchos* 1.1.399–400, where the author describes how God's intervention gave rise to various languages, 'in which the respective nations speak' (*quis gentes quaeque locuntur*). Somewhat more explicitly, Avitus of Vienne describes in *Poemata* 4.125–126 how 'everyone joins himself to the words he is able to understand (*se quisque suis, possit quae noscere, uerbis aggregat*)', and every nation follows the new languages (*nouas sequitur gens quaeque loquellas*). A limited view and a definite number of languages are also proposed by Arnobius the Younger, who is preoccupied in *Commentarii in Psalmos* 104 (CCSL 25: 159–160) with harmonizing the 'thousand generations' of 1 Par. 16:15 to the Augustinian number of 72 languages (Sect. 7.1, p. 224f.). Counting 27 languages in the part of the world given to Sem, 22 in the part given to Ham, and 23 in the part given to Japhet, Arnobius is able to maintain the Augustinian *summa* (cf. Major 2013: 35–37): 'So in all, that comes to 72 languages' (*funt ergo omnes simul linguae septuaginta duae*). Whereas we have seen that in the period preceding Augustine, there was a considerable divergence in opinions with regard

to the number of post-Babelic languages, it is clear that there are no authors writing after Augustine who explicitly contradict the Augustinian number of 72 languages.

Isidore: A Streamlining and Codification of Augustine's Views

Augustine's 'limited' view, involving 72 post-Babelic languages, occupies a firmly fixed place in Isidore's expositions on language history (cf. Major 2013: 37–42),²¹ which can be read as a codification of Augustine's ideas on the issue. The 'classic' evidence for this belief in Isidore's works is in *Etym.* 9.2.2. Isidore there argues that the earth was divided—necessarily after the events of Babel, although he does not explicitly state this here—among the nations attributed to the three sons of Noah (*gentes ... a quibus diuisa est terra*). He states that 15 nations descended from Japhet, 31 from Ham, and 27 from Sem, and subsequently integrates Augustine's announcement of his calculation from *De civitate Dei* 16.6.2, in a slightly altered form (cf. Borst 1958: 453):

this gives 73 or rather, as calculation shows (*ut ratio declarat*), 72 nations (*septuaginta duae*), and just as many languages (*totidemque linguae*), which arose across the lands and, as they increased (*crescendo*), filled the provinces and islands.

It can be inferred from this passage that to Isidore's mind, there were 72 languages in the period immediately after Babel, before the number of languages started to increase (cf. below, p. 116). The firmly rooted belief that there were 72 nations and languages immediately after Babel is also obliquely evidenced on various occasions throughout Isidore's works. In *Etym.* 16.26.16 the encyclopaedist notes that the Egyptian measure named *artaba* consists of 72 *sex-tarii*, 'composed of that number because of the seventy-two nations and languages (*septuaginta et duas gentes uel linguas*) that have filled the world'. In his *Allegoriae in uetus testamentum* 65 (PL 83: 109–110) Isidore argues that

the 72 elderly men [Num. 11], over whom the Holy Spirit came, symbolize the 72 languages of the nations (*septuaginta duas nationum linguas*) spread over this world, from which many believers have received the grace of the Holy Spirit.

²¹ Isidore passingly refers to Babel as the origin of language diversity on a wide variety of occasions throughout his works, cf. *Chronica* 1/2.21–22; *Etym.* 5.39.6, 7.6.23–24, 14.3.12, 15.1.4; *Quaestiones in uetus testamentum* Gen. 2.4 (PL 83: 213), 9.1–4 (PL 83: 237–238). Also cf. Major's (2013: 37–42) discussion of Isidore and the number 72.

Similar interpretations of the 72 languages are witnessed elsewhere in Isidore's works. In *De ecclesiasticis officiis* 1.11.7 he relates the number of canonical books to the number of languages. He establishes that the canonical books are 72 in number, and that it is according to this number that 'Moses elected 72 priests who were to prophetize' and that 'Jesus our Lord ordered 72 disciples to preach'. But fundamentally, Isidore goes on to explain, it is

because there were 72 languages spread over this world, that the Holy Spirit suitably provided that there should be as many [canonical] books as there were nations (*nationes*), books by which the peoples and nations (*populi et gentes*) would be edified in order to receive the grace of faith.

It should be pointed out that on two occasions, Isidore also expresses the belief that there were 70 languages instead of 72, presumably due to the direct exegetical context. In *Quaestiones in uetus testamentum* Iud. 6.2 he states that while the numerous wives of Gedeon stand for the 'nations which have adhered by the faith in Christ', Gedeon's 70 sons stand for 'the 70 languages that are spread over this world, in which the Lord will produce for Himself sons in faith'. At Num. 42.3 in the same work, Isidore describes how 'the grace of the Holy Spirit was diffused in faith over the peoples that had been elected from the 70 languages of the nations (*ex septuaginta gentium linguis*)'. Lastly, in *Chronica* 1/2.18 and *Quaestiones in uetus testamentum* Gen. 8.14, Isidore simply refers to the Augustinian number of 72 nations (*septuaginta duae gentes*), without explicitly relating these to the number of post-Babelic languages.

Like Augustine, Isidore also comments on the subsequent differentiation of the initial 72 post-Babelic languages. Isidore's view on the issue amounts to Augustine's principle (*De ciuitate Dei* 16.6.2) that 'the number of nations increased much stronger than the number of languages'.²² In *Etym.* 9.1.14, at the end of the chapter *De linguis gentium*, and immediately before the second chapter *De gentium uocabulis*, Isidore on this basis formulates the following methodological principle, which is crucial for his approach to ethnolinguistic matters:

We have treated languages first, and then nations (*prius de linguis, ac deinde de gentibus posuimus*), because nations arose from languages (*quia ex linguis gentes ... exortae sunt*), and not languages from nations (*non ex gentibus linguae*).

²² Parallel indicated by Reydellet (1984: 31 n. 2).

This principle, it should first be noted, is revealing of the intimate connection between language and ethnicity in Isidore's conception of the world. Languages and 'nations' cannot exist without each other, or cannot be defined without reference to each other. It can furthermore be inferred from the above quotation that to Isidore's mind, it is in the first instance languages that were diversified in Babel. Only as a consequence of this linguistic diversification (into 72 languages, that is), people started clustering with those who happened to speak the same language as they did, and thus formed 'nations'. The alternative which Isidore is here refuting would involve that God's punishment at Babel first gave rise to a diversity of 'nations', and that only secondarily different languages arose among people who happened to belong to the same ethnic groups. To restate, Isidore believes that immediately after Babel, there were 72 languages, giving rise to 72 'nations'.

This is also what Isidore affirms in *Etym.* 9.1.1, before treating the further development of the number of languages and nations. Elaborating on Augustine's statement (*De ciuitate Dei* 16.6.2) that 'the number of nations increased much stronger than the number of languages' (cf. Pohl 1998: 23), he argues:

But at the outset there were as many languages as there were nations (*quot gentes, tot linguae fuerunt*), and then (*deinde*) more nations than languages (*plures gentes quam linguae*), because many nations sprang from one language (*ex una lingua multae sunt gentes exortae*).

Whereas the original division into 72 languages gave rise to 72 initial 'nations' following a one-to-one correspondence between language and nation, Isidore thus argues that in the course of the subsequent developments, various nations originated from the 72 existing nations with their 72 respective languages. It can be hypothesized, but it is nowhere explicitly stated by Isidore, that only in this stage new 'language varieties' arose among people who happened to belong to the same nascent 'subgroups'. This inference is possibly confirmed by a passage in *Etym.* 9.2.97, where Isidore discusses the variety of Germanic nations (*Germaniae gentes*) (cf. Pohl 1998: 17, 23–24). He writes that 'there are many tribes of *Germani*, varied in their tools, differing in the colour of their clothes, of mutually incomprehensible languages (*linguis dissonae*), and with uncertain etymologies of their names'. Although this statement possibly relates to the fact that *Germani* is a rather vague, 'catch-all' term, it may be taken to imply that in Isidore's conception, the ethnic subgroups started to develop mutually incomprehensible languages as a consequence of a life in (relative) isolation.

Summary

Whereas the two previous chapters respectively dealt with language origin and with the primeval situation in language history, this chapter logically followed suit by discussing early Christian Latin authors' opinions on the end of the primeval situation and the origin of language diversity. The methodological point of departure for this chapter, following the lead of Sherman (2013), was that the Babel narrative of Gen. 11 is in fact rather vague, incomplete and inconsistent, and that early Christian Latin authors, just as their Jewish and Greek Christian predecessors, applied a number of 'adaptive strategies' in dealing with these gaps and inconsistencies.

The first section of this chapter focused on how the authors tackled the problematic relationship between Gen. 10 and Gen. 11. Throughout the period covered by this study, some authors follow the strategy of keeping entirely silent about the discrepancy. Before Augustine, the author of the *Liber antiquitatum biblicarum* has the different nations of Gen. 10 reunite before he describes the events of Babel, while Filastrius acknowledges the exegetic potential of the heretical idea—without subscribing to it—that linguistic diversity existed already before Babel (cf. Gen. 10), but that mankind until the events of Babel possessed an 'angelic grace' by which to counter it. Augustine—who is literally quoted by Isidore—adopts the Donatist Tyconius' exegetical device of *recapitulatio* and argues that Gen. 11 describes events historically preceding those described in Gen. 10. Similar but less elaborate solutions are applied by Sulpicius Severus and Claudio Marius Victorius, who in different ways 'merge' the information provided in Gen. 11 with that provided in Gen. 10.

The second section dealt with the authors' appraisals of God's reaction, relevant because of their implications for the authors' appraisals of linguistic diversity generally. Whereas the Babel narrative, only by its internal logic, involves the notion that God's intervention is an action 'against' mankind, it has been shown that several authors supplement or specify the information provided in Gen. 11 by evaluating God's intervention in a particular way. More specifically, some authors (*Liber antiquitatum biblicarum*, Hilary of Poitiers, Jerome, Augustine, Prosper, the *praefatio* that has been linked to Leo, Fulgentius the mythographer, Cassiodorus) read God's intervention in an outright pessimistic way, in terms of punishment or retaliation, while others, or the same authors in different contexts (Jerome, Augustine, *Consultationes Zacchaei et Apollonii*, John Cassian, Claudio Marius Victorius) maintain a slightly more optimistic interpretation; the latter group of authors interpret linguistic diversity as a minor inconvenience when compared to the Flood, and thus as an

indication of God's benignity. In some specific cases, God's reaction is interpreted as a 'pedagogical tap' intended to keep man on the path towards salvation.

The last section was concerned with the authors' opinions concerning the degree of differentiation and the number of post-Babelic languages—another issue which is left unsettled in Gen. 11 but which is partly informed by the Table of Nations in Gen. 10. A distinction was made between authors holding a 'maximal' and others holding a 'limited' conception of the linguistic differentiation immediately after Babel. Special attention has been paid to the authors with a 'limited' conception of linguistic differentiation who also posit a precise number of post-Babelic languages. Within the period covered by this study, the authors with a 'maximal' conception are Ambrosiaster and the author of the *Consultationes*; those with a 'limited' conception but without a definite number of languages are Quodvultdeus, Claudio Marius Victorius, Cyprianus Gallus, and Avitus of Vienne; lastly, those with a 'limited' conception and a definite number of languages are Filastrius (75), Pacian (120), Jerome (72,000), Augustine (72), Prosper (72), Arnobius the Younger (72), and Isidore (72). The latter series again demonstrates that there was a considerable fluctuation in language-historical thought before Augustine, but that at least the crucial points were 'canonized' from Augustine's *De ciuitate Dei* onwards. The different numbers of languages posited by the authors will also be relevant for the language classifications discussed in Sect. 7.1 (p. 224f.).

PART 2

Language Diversity

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Appraisals and Uses of Linguistic Diversity

Among historiographers of linguistic ideas, it is commonly held that the ‘Greeks and Romans’ of pagan antiquity hardly paid any attention to the reality of linguistic diversity (cf. Van Hal 2009: 147–151, with further references). In the present study, it has repeatedly been stated that this situation changed to a considerable extent in Christian late antiquity. Having discussed early Christian Latin authors’ views on language history (Part 1), I will now turn to their appraisals and uses of linguistic diversity. By ‘uses’ I mean the ways in which the authors mention or employ the reality of linguistic diversity in their exposition, or valorize it in function of their specific argument. The basic assumption for this and the following two chapters is that a negative notion is permanently implied when early Christian Latin authors comment on linguistic diversity, due to the fact that this reality is in their opinion the undesirable consequence of the events of Babel (Ch. 3). This basic assumption is well summarized by Formigari (2004: 83), who states that ‘we would look in vain for a positive evaluation of linguistic diversity in [the] Ancient and Medieval world. Certainly, the story of Babel’s curse did not suggest or promote it’.

The general purpose of the present chapter is to investigate to which specific uses this global negative evaluation was put by early Christian Latin authors. In order to do so, the following research questions will be asked: (1) Do the authors present linguistic diversity as something futile when faced with professedly ‘superior’ entities? (2) Do they, on the contrary, present linguistic diversity as an impediment to various types of contact or transfer? (3) Do they use linguistic diversity as an analogy to religious ‘heterodoxy’? And, (4) do they present linguistic diversity as an indicator of the universal spread of faith? Apart from these research questions, concerned primarily with ‘uses’ of language diversity, this chapter will also try to assess the general validity of Formigari’s statement (and of the basic assumption for this chapter) by asking (5) whether it is possible to discern any comparatively positive evaluations of the reality of linguistic diversity.

Before starting this investigation, two preliminary notes are in order. First, it is important to draw attention to a metonymic use of Latin phrases meaning ‘every language’. According to this use, ‘every language’ stands for ‘every nation’ of the world, and phrases such as ‘every language confesses’ can thus be used to emphasize the universal and absolute character of God’s omnipotence. The metonymic use of such phrases was apparently enhanced by their occurrence

in various Bible passages—although this does not mean that it would not have been possible otherwise.¹ It is of course significant that exactly language is chosen as a *pars pro toto* for nation, but the authors' discussions of these phrases are often very passing in nature. Accordingly, they will only be analyzed when they are put to a specific use. Second, there is a thematic connection between the subject matter of this chapter and the widespread notion that the Gospel and the 'Word of God' should not be restricted by the rules of traditional grammar. One famous example is Gregory the Great's statement (*Moralia in Job*, § 5 of the dedicatory *Epistula ad Leandrum*) that 'I consider it very unworthy to confine (*ut ... restringam*) the words of the heavenly oracle (*uerba caelstis oraculi*) under the rules of Donatus (*sub regulis Donati*)' (cf. e.g. Holtz 1981: 254–255; Beumann 1964; Bartelink 1984b). The idea—also frequently voiced in Augustine's works—is that Christian faith transcends the 'futile' rules of grammar and cannot be restrained by them. This theme has received extensive attention in scholarly literature and falls outside of this chapter's primary scope.²

1 Language Diversity as a Futility

The notion that the languages spoken by men are different and variable, while the concepts or ideas expressed in them are the same for all, can be traced back (at least) to Aristotle, who states in *De interpretatione* 1.16a that 'speech is not the same (*οὐδὲ φωναὶ αἱ αὐταὶ*) for all humans', but that

the mental affections themselves, of which these words are primarily signs, are the same for all humans (*ταῦτὰ πᾶσι παθήματα τῆς ψυχῆς*), as are also the objects of which those affections are representations of likeness, images, or copies.

It should be pointed out, with Swiggers & Wouters (2011: 11 n. 20), that Aristotle's statement expresses a straightforwardly non-relativistic view on 'language as the direct expression of universally shared mental contents'. This view is thus

¹ E.g. Ps. 18:4–5: *Non sunt loquellae neque sermones quorum non audiantur uoces eorum. In omnem terram exiuit sonus eorum et in fines orbis terrae uerba eorum;* and, furthermore, Is. 45:23, Is. 66:18, Dan. 3:98 (4:1), Dan. 7:14, Zach. 8:23, Rom. 14:11, Phil. 2:11, Apoc. 5:9.

² Some useful discussions of this subject are provided by Marrou (4¹⁹⁵⁸: 349, 525), Bartelink (1960), Riché (3¹⁹⁷²: 129–133, 195), Berrouard (sc 71: 362–365), Auerbach (1958), Curtius (6¹⁹⁶⁷: 56, 452), Bambeck (1983), Resnick (1990: 69), Banniard (1992a: 73, 77, 98–99), and Burton (2009).

diametrically opposed to the belief that people's perceptions and ideas are influenced by the languages they speak—a belief which would in later ages manifest itself in the Humboldtian view on language and thought, and in the so-called Sapir-Whorf hypothesis (cf. e.g. Schlesinger 1991). In early Christian Greek literature, the non-relativistic view was developed as follows by Origen in *Contra Celsum* 8.37, in direct connection with the proclaimed universality of Christian faith (cf. Werner 1992: 18):

... but the Greeks speak in Greek, and the Romans in Latin; and so each one according to his language (έχαστος κατὰ τὴν ἑαυτοῦ διάλεκτον) prays to God and sings His praises as he is able. And the Lord of every language (ὁ πάσης διαλέκτου κύριος) hears those who pray in every language (τῶν ἀπὸ πάσης διαλέκτου εὐχομένων ἀκούει) as though He were hearing one utterance, so to speak, the same meaning being expressed by the various languages (ώς μιᾶς ... φωνῆς τῆς κατὰ τὰ σημανόμενα ἀκούων, δηλουμένης ἐκ τῶν ποικίλων διαλέκτων). For the supreme God is not one of those that have been allotted a particular language, barbarian or Greek, who no longer understand the rest or are no longer willing to pay heed to those who speak in other languages.

When early Christian Latin authors, like their Greek predecessors, consistently contrast linguistic diversity to various allegedly 'permanent' entities (such as, most prominently, Christian faith), it seems justified to denote them as 'secondary' exponents of Aristotle's non-relativistic view on language, rhetorically elaborating on a commonplace rather than actively defending this view. It comes as no surprise that there are no early Christian Latin authors who expressly propose a relativistic point of view.

Dispersed Comments on the Futility of Language Diversity and the Universality of God's Reign

Concise references to the futility of language diversity can be found in a number of authors. A first clear instance can already be found in the apologetic context of Tertullian's *De testimonio animae* 6.3. Arguing that 'it is not to the Latins and Greeks alone that the soul comes as a gift from heaven', the author elaborates that

among all the nations man is one and the same, though the name varies (*omnium gentium unus homo, uarium nomen est*); there is one soul, though many tongues (*una anima, uaria vox*); one spirit, though many sounds (*unus spiritus, uarius sonus*). Each people has its own language,

but the matter of every language is common to all (*propria cuique genti loquela, sed loquelae materia communis*).

Another instance occurs in Pacian of Barcelona's *Ep.* 2.4.5–6 to Simpronian, where the author is defending himself for having quoted a verse from Vergil, a pagan poet after all (Costanza 1978). Pacian states that every human is bound to rely on the restricted number of words and phrases that are available in his own language, and argues that all existing languages—120 according to his peculiar point of view (Sect. 3.3, p. 109)—equally emanate from the 'resource' of God. Consequently, he argues, it does not matter at all which language one uses to worship God, since the Holy Spirit understands all languages without distinction. In order to corroborate this argument, Pacian quotes a variety of nations—'Latium, Egypt, Athens, and Thracians, Arabians, and Spaniards'—all of which successfully worship God in their own language. The rhetorical form of this argument, with the catalogue of nations and their languages, presents linguistic diversity as a futile reality which necessarily emanates from, and is thus subordinate to God. The futility or irrelevance of linguistic diversity is also used by Jerome, when in *Commentarii in Isaiam* 15.54.11/14 he proclaims the universality of God's reign. Arguing that 'God is by no means the God of one nation, but of the entire world', Jerome enumerates a number of oppositions which allegedly give rise to divisions among the world's population. One of these is the long-standing opposition between Greeks and barbarians (*Graeci et barbari*), which is inextricably connected to a notion of linguistic otherness (e.g. Opelt & Speyer 2001). However, as he does with all the other seeming oppositions which he mentions, Jerome presents the linguistically based difference as irrelevant when faced with God's universality.

Having retold the story of Babel (cf. above, p. 112), Quodvultdeus in *Liber promissionum et praedictorum Dei* 1.8.14 argues that God's grace 'gathered under one teaching (*uno sub dogmate congregauit*) what haughty impiety had badly dispersed (*quae superba impietas male disperserat*)'. He subsequently includes Ps. 60:4 in Phil. 2:11 when stating that 'now every language confesses as one that our Lord Jesus Christ, who is the tower of strength'—as opposed to the tower of Babel—is in the glory of God, His Father.³ The division of languages brought about by the Babelites' arrogance is thus said to be neutralized by God's unifying grace. Since all languages are said now to confess God as one,

³ The original Bible verses are the following (in the Vulgate version): *Et omnis lingua confiteatur quia Dominus Iesus Christus in gloria est Dei Patris* (Phil. 2:11) and *Quia factus es spes mea turris fortitudinis a facie inimici* (Ps. 60:4).

the unity of Christian faith is made by far superior to the division of languages. The futile nature of linguistic diversity is also deployed by Fulgentius of Ruspe, who argues in *Ep. 17.31.61* that the goodness of God saves all people or—in other words—‘people from every nation (*ex omni gente*), every condition and age, from every language (*ex omni lingua*), from every province (*ex omni prouincia*)’. Just as much as ethnic, geographic and social diversity, linguistic diversity is presented as an irrelevant circumstance with regard to the universality of faith and of God’s salvific will.

Augustine: A Varied Use of the Futility of Linguistic Diversity

Augustine frequently and consistently uses the alleged futility of linguistic diversity in order to contrast it to professedly ‘superior’ realities. He does so in a number of different but interrelated ways. In this section I will first discuss a number of passages where this use occurs in a rather straightforward way, and then move on to a series of ‘specific cases’ where it is connected to a particular theological or exegetic point. The basic assumption for all of these uses is that linguistic expression is variable, while the concept or referent signified is permanent. This notion is not original to Augustine, but goes back to Aristotle (cf. above, p. 122) through Stoic philosophy of language.

In close connection to his general language-philosophical and semiotic views, Augustine often employs the futility of linguistic diversity in order to emphasize the permanence of ‘reality’ (concept or referent). In *De doctrina Christiana* 2.24.37 Augustine seems to suggest that linguistic differences are a matter of convention and as such only superficial when compared to actual, ‘natural’ or ‘referential’ differences. He writes that the single letter sign ⟨x⟩ has a different meaning in Greek and in Latin, and that this is ‘not because of its nature (*non natura*), but because of some kind of decision and agreement about what it should signify (*placito et consensione significandi*)’ (cf. Rist 1994: 35). Likewise, he goes on to argue, the word *beta* ‘is the name of a letter for the Greeks and of a vegetable [the beet] for the Latins’, and by the two syllables of the word *lege* ‘a Greek understands one thing ... a Latin speaker another’. He then extensively accounts for the conventional character of linguistic differences:

So all these various meanings strike people’s minds according to what has been agreed by the group each of them belongs to (*pro sua cuiusque societatis consensione*); and because each group has a different agreement (*quia diuersa consensio est*) they will strike each person differently (*diuerse mouent*). And people have not agreed about their meanings because they already had in themselves any particular signifying value (*iam*

*ualebant ad significationem); but the reason they have such value is that people have come to an agreement about them (*sed ideo ualent, quia consenserunt in eas*).*

This passage in fact combines a number of different issues, namely (a) the notion that linguistic signs are arbitrary, (b) the observation that there exist different languages, and (c) the (non-relativistic) notion that linguistic diversity does not involve diversity of ideas. Augustine's exposition seems to suggest that while human language as such is firmly grounded in a natural capacity, the differences that exist between actual human languages are only conventional and as such secondary to the realities which words have to designate. This opposition is obviously based on the ancient antithesis between nature and convention (Sect. 1.1, p. 26), but the antithesis is here connected to language diversity specifically instead of language generally. In a comparable way, Augustine argues in *De musica* 3.2.3 that people cannot discuss the terminology or metalanguage of a discipline in the same way as they can discuss its subject matter (*res*), because the subject matter is inherent to the minds of all people commonly (*omnium mentibus communiter sunt insitae*), while the terms themselves have been imposed arbitrarily (*ut cuique placuit imposita*) (cf. Sect. 1.1, p. 26).⁴ He argues that the meaning (*uis*) of these terms is based primarily on authority and usage (*auctoritate atque consuetudine*)—two prominent practical criteria for 'linguistic convention'—and that it is for this reason that diversity can exist among languages (*unde ... esse linguarum diuersitas potest*) but not among ideas, since these are fixed in truth itself (cf. Ayers 1979: 71–72). The traditional 'sanctioning' factors of authority and usage are thus limited to the domain of the individual human languages. The line of Augustine's argument is clearly analogous to Aristotle's non-relativistic view on language and thought (cf. above, p. 122).

In *Confessiones* 11.3.5 Augustine makes it plain that the 'inner truth', which indicates to a human whether or not a 'received' utterance is true, amounts to Christ, the 'inner teacher' (cf. *De magistro* 11.38; Fuhrer 2009: 133–134). He

⁴ A brief analogy can be found in *Confessiones* 10.20.29, where Augustine reflects on the connection between the reality of a blessed life and the specific denoting phrase *uita beata*. Arguing that it is not the phrase itself that makes people happy, but the kind of life to which it refers, he gives the example of a Greek who hears the Latin phrase, and who experiences no pleasure because he does not understand what the term refers to. Although speakers of Greek, Latin, and other languages want to acquire a blessed life and although it is thus known to everyone, he explains, 'the thing itself (*res ipsa*) is neither Greek nor Latin (*nec Graeca nec Latina est*).

argues furthermore that this ‘inner truth’ transcends the boundaries of linguistic diversity; it is ‘neither Hebrew, nor Greek, nor Latin, nor barbarian’, and ‘it would say without the organs of mouth and tongue, without the noise of syllables: ‘what he says is true’.⁵ This means that the truth value of linguistically ‘materialized’ assertions is defined not just by (non-linguistic) introspection, but with reference to the second person of Trinity, understood as the teacher of (inner) truth. Making a distinction in *Confessiones* 13.24.36 between signification on the level of the body and understanding on the level of the mind, Augustine contrasts the simple (singular) nature of the love of God and one’s neighbour to the ‘numerous sacraments’ of the Church—‘sacrament’ here meaning ‘a sign of a sacred thing’ (Brown 2009: 37)—, the ‘innumerable languages’ (*innumerabilibus linguis*), and the ‘innumerable phrases of any particular language’ (*in unaquaque lingua innumerabilibus locutionum modis*) in which this simple love can be expressed on the bodily level.

This use of language diversity is also connected to a typological line of exegesis, which involves an Old Testament prefiguration of a New Testament event. The use here consists in contrasting the variability of prefigurations to the singularity of the event prefigured. This use occurs in *Contra aduersarium legis et prophetarum* 1.18.37, where Augustine argues that the crucifixion of Christ—‘the one true and singular sacrifice’—was prefigured in many ways. He compares this relation of prefiguration to the way in which ‘one thing (*res una*) can be indicated by many utterances (*multis locutionibus*) and in many languages (*multis linguis*)’. Another specific use of the futility of language diversity relates to Augustine’s attempt to harmonize the divergent accounts of the four Gospels in *De consensu euangelistarum*. This concords with the overarching approach of the work, where Augustine claims to deal ‘not with the words but with the facts’ (*non tam uerborum quam rerum*) that are described in the Gospels (cf. Harrison 2001: 164). At 2.12.28 Augustine argues that the truth of the Gospel, which was conveyed in the eternal and unchangeable word of God, ‘was disseminated throughout the world by the temporal signs and languages

⁵ Augustine develops a similar argument in *Ep. 102.10*: ‘it makes no difference if people worship with different ceremonies in accordance with the different requirements of times and places, as long as what is worshipped is holy—just as it makes no difference if one speaks with different sounds in accordance with the different requirements of languages and hearers (*pro diuersa linguarum auditorumque congruentia*), as long as what is said is the truth. There is, of course, the difference that even human beings can by a certain social pact (*pacto quodam societatis*), as it were, institute (*instituere*) sounds for a language by which to share their ideas with each other, whereas those whose thinking was correct followed the will of God with regard to the rites by which they should worship the divinity.’

of men (*temporalibus signis et linguis hominum*)'. In this way, the temporal and variable character of human language(s) is opposed to the permanent and transcendent nature of the word of God.

Augustine also uses language diversity in his anti-Donatist rhetoric (which will be discussed extensively in Sect. 4.3, p. 136f., and 6.3, p. 205f.). With reference to the events of Pentecost, *Sermo 162A* against the Donatists in § 11 employs the belief that language diversity is only a circumstance of secondary importance when faced with the unity of Christian faith. Augustine states that the Holy Spirit announced that the gospel would be proclaimed in all languages, and argues that 'even now the Church speaks in all languages (*loquitur ... omnibus linguis*), because the gospel cries out in all languages (*in omnibus ... linguis clamat*)'. Integrating Paul's image of the body of Christ, he rhetorically develops this argument as follows:

Just as the eye says: 'The foot walks for me', so too the foot says: 'The eye sees for me'—so too I say: 'My language is Greek (*lingua mea est Graeca*), my language is Hebrew (*lingua mea est Hebraea*), my language is Syriac (*lingua mea Syra*)', because one faith holds them all together (*omnes enim una fides tenet*), one network of charity enfolds them all (*omnes enim una caritatis compago concludit*).

Augustine in this passage presents the various languages of the world as separate entities which are brought together by the *una caritatis compago*. By connecting the issue of language diversity to the image of the human body, a standard Pauline symbol for the Church (1 Cor. 12:27), Augustine compares the individual languages to the respective parts of the human body. In doing so, he makes it clear that linguistic diversity is made irrelevant by the unity of Christian faith.

A specific use of language diversity relates to the distinction between *uerbum* and *uox* which Augustine develops in various sermons (cf. Denecker & Partoens 2014). This distinction ultimately goes back, by way of Tertullian (*Aduersus Praxeas*) and early Christian Greek authors—most importantly Origen (Robertson 2010)—to the Stoic distinction between λόγος ἐνδιάθετος and λόγος προφορικός (Mühl 1962, Toom 2007). Augustine uses this distinction as an analogy either (1) to the relation between the divine nature of Christ (as the second person of Trinity) and His human nature (which He took on through the incarnation) (Bavaud 1963, Schindler 1965, Pintarić 1983), or (2) to the relation between Christ and John the Baptist. Each time Augustine develops this analogy, he presents *uerbum* (thought, the mental conception) as a permanent and stable entity, while *uox* (exteriorized language, speech) is presented as vari-

able and temporary. In order to illustrate the variability of human language, Augustine frequently inserts language catalogues. This is what he does in the continuation of *In Iohannis euangelium tractatus* 14.7.⁶ Sketching a situation where the ‘word of the heart’ has already been conceived but not yet been uttered, he addresses his audience as his imagined speakers:

you are paying attention to the one it is meant for, to the one you are talking to; if he is a speaker of Latin, you look for a Latin expression; if he is Greek, you think up some Greek words; if he is a speaker of Punic, you ask yourself whether you know the Punic language. According to the diversity of your hearers (*pro diuersitate auditorum*), you make use of different languages (*diuersas linguas adhibes*) in order to utter the word you have conceived; but the word you have conceived in your heart was being held there in no particular language (*nulla lingua tenebatur*).

In Augustine’s presentation, human language in its diversity is secondary to the ‘language of the mind’ or ‘inner language’, to the concepts or ideas it has to express. According to the theory developed in the later books of *De trinitate*, the language of the mind (*uerbum interius / intimum, uerbum mentis / cordis*) is stable and permanent, and precedes exteriorized human language. Moreover, due to its analogy with the Word of God (*uerbum Dei*), the inner language is also necessarily true (Fuhrer 2009: 137). It is only in order to communicate these ideas conceived in the language of the mind to particular language users that ideas need to be ‘translated’ into the temporal, variable and conventional entities that human languages are.

A last particular use of the futility of linguistic diversity is specific to the salvation theology of *De ciuitate Dei*. At 14.1 in this work, Augustine expounds the principle of the ‘two cities’—the ‘earthly city’ as opposed to the ‘heavenly city’—which is crucial to his theology of history (cf. e.g. Rist 2012: 220). He argues that there are only two orders or ‘cities’ of human society,

although there are a great many nations throughout the world, living according to different rites and customs and distinguished by many different forms of language, tools and dress (*multiplici linguarum armorum uestium ... uarietate distinctae*).

⁶ With slight differences, other instances can be found in *Sermones* 187.2, 225.3, 288.3, and 293A.7–8. Cf. also *De trinitate* 14.7.10, 15.10.19, 15.14.24, 15.21.41, 15.23.43, 15.27.50. On the language catalogues in *Sermones* 288 and 293A, cf. Denecker & Partoens (2014: 100–101, 111).

Multiplicity of languages is thus indicative of the ethnic diversity across which the two cities of mankind exist, but is also of secondary importance when compared to the principal division of mankind into an earthly and a heavenly city. The same point is made at 19.17, where Augustine argues that the heavenly city—the ‘pilgrim on earth’—‘summons citizens from all nations and brings together a society of pilgrims in every tongue (*in omnibus linguis peregrinam colligit societatem*)’. In conclusion, Augustine makes it clear that ‘whatever differences there are among the various nations, these all tend towards the same end of earthly peace’.⁷

Collatio Augustini cum Pascentio: The Irrelevance of Language Diversity in the homoousios Debate

The *Collatio Augustini cum Pascentio*, which probably dates to the late 5th century, is a fictitious dialogue between Augustine and the Arian Pascentius (Windau 2002), based on the epistolary exchange between both men. The anonymous author of the dialogue has Augustine and Pascentius debate the Arian question—regarding the nature of the relation between the first and the second person of Trinity—and has Augustine focus on the defense of the term *homoousios* (ὁμοούσιος), indicating the Nicene, anti-Arian position that the Father and the Son are ‘of the same substance’ (cf. Heil 2007, Vössing 2008).⁸ It is within this context that linguistic diversity is used in order to demonstrate the futility of terminological issues when faced with theological ‘reality’.⁹ The author has Augustine rhetorically amplify his main argument at 15.73–75. Augustine there argues that the term *homoousios* is mistakenly and unjustly criticized, because ‘it is not just a word, but a reality in a word’ and ‘it is not just speech that resounds to the ears, but the one substance of God that should be believed in in our minds’.

7 The passage was integrated in the pseudo-Augustinian *Contra philosophos* (CPL 360), *disputatio* 5.

8 On Augustine’s actual anti-Arian works, cf. Mara (1988), Barnes (1999a), and Heil (2012); on Arianism and the Arian controversy generally, cf. Barnes (1999b) and, extensively, Berndt & Steinacher (2014).

9 A related but different use of linguistic diversity can be found at 2.1–5, in an analogy for Christ’s both fully human and fully divine nature. It is argued that Christ ‘on the outside showed the weakness of the full man, but on the inside bore the power of divinity’, and that this is so in the same way as some things ‘sound differently in the words of various languages (*in uerbis diuersarum linguarum aliter sonant*)’, but contain something else hidden on the inside’.

The argument is further developed in 15.139–169, where the author has Augustine argue that one should not criticize the term *homoousios* just because it is a Greek (foreign) word, since various Greek (*Christus, anathema*) and even ‘Syriac’ (*maranatha*) nouns or names are accepted by Latin Christians and since it is pointless to criticize terms instead of the realities they denote. The broader implication of this line of argument is that the specific phrasing of a doctrinal point, in a particular worldly language, is secondary to the doctrinal point denoted. More generally, linguistic diversity is only accidental to the essence of faith. The same point is urged more strongly in 15.192–206, where the author refers to formulae of faith in ‘barbarian’ languages. This passage has become famous as a source for a brief phrase belonging to the Vandal language, viz. *froia arme*, ‘Lord, have mercy’.¹⁰ The author has Augustine argue that it is perfectly possible not only for a barbarian to confess the triune God in his own barbarian language, but even for a speaker of Latin to use a formula in a barbarian language—*froia arme* instead of *Domine miserere*—to invoke the help of God. This argument implies that it is irrelevant exactly in which specific language Trinity is named or invoked, as long as the very nature of Trinity is clear to those who believe in it.¹¹

Boethius: The Futility of Linguistic Diversity in a Didactic Version of Aristotle’s Non-Relativism

A case of special interest, because of its intimate connection with the Aristotelian passus quoted at the beginning of this section, can be found in the second edition of Boethius’ commentary on Aristotle’s *De interpretatione*. In the passage concerned (1.1 [Meiser 1880: 21]), Boethius uses the futility of language diversity when developing a didactic account of Aristotle’s non-relativistic view on thought in relation to language. In other words, Boethius emphasizes the identity of thought (concept or referent) by contrasting it to linguistic diversity.

¹⁰ Cf. e.g. Eis (1960), Tiefenbach (1991), Reichert (2008), and Steinacher (2008: 254). Our only other literary source for the Vandal language is epigram Shackleton Bailey 279 in the *Anthologia Latina*, entitled *De conuiuīis barbaris* (Riché 31972: 101; Adams 2003: 275): *Inter eils Goticum scapia matzia ia drincan / non audet quisquam dignos edicere uersus*. In translation the epigram runs as follows: ‘Under the Gothic cries ‘hail’, and ‘let us eat and drink’; no one dares to bring forth worthy verses.’ The phrases quoted in the epigram are indeed labelled *Goticum*, but Reichert (2008: 154) argues that we are concerned here with Vandal phrases; cf. Riché (31972: 101).

¹¹ In Greek Christian literature, an extreme argument involving barbarian languages and the validity of prayers was formulated by Clement of Alexandria, who states in *Stromata* 1.21 that ‘prayers uttered in barbarian tongues have greater power’ (cf. Thomson forthc.).

Generally considered an important exponent of a mental language common to all humans (Hovdhaugen 1982: 109; Marenbon 2003: 36), Boethius argues that although a Roman, a Greek, and a barbarian have the same ‘understanding’ (*eundem intellectum*) of a horse,

the Greek calls the horse by one word (*Graecus aliter equum uocat*), the Roman word designating a horse is still another (*alia quoque uox in equi significatione Romana est*), and the barbarian differs from both in how he designates a horse (*barbarus ab utroque in equi designatione dissentit*).

This is in fact nothing more than the point made by Aristotle, but the horse example appears to be original to Boethius’ didactic elaboration. Without entering into the specifics of Boethius’ philosophy of language, I would like to point out the similarity this passage bears to the God-example—*deus, θεός, ylim*—which Augustine uses in various sermons in order to demonstrate the variability of the *uox* as opposed to the absolute character of the *uerbum* (cf. above, p. 128; Denecker & Partoens 2014: 115). This is not to suggest that Boethius was influenced by Augustine’s rhetoric. Rather, it seems plausible that Augustine, in stressing the variability of human language by means of a ‘language catalogue’, was influenced to some extent by an Aristotelian or Neoplatonic ‘school tradition’, broadly speaking. In Boethius’ didactic exposition, specific human languages appear to be of secondary importance—because of their variable, conventional and arbitrary character—when compared to the absolute *intellectus* of the mental language.

2 Language Diversity as an Impediment

Several authors for various purposes use the belief that language diversity constitutes an impediment to diverse forms of contact or transfer, broadly speaking. When at first sight, this use of language diversity seems incompatible with the one discussed in the preceding section, which presents language diversity as a futility, it should be assumed that there is a certain point where languages become sufficiently different as to form an impediment.¹² However, one should evidently also take into account the rhetorical strength of claiming that (e.g.)

¹² A vague instance is provided by Rufinus, who briefly refers to the reality of linguistic diversity in his continuation of Eusebius of Caesarea’s *Historia ecclesiastica*, when dealing with the portions of the earth allotted to the different apostles. He writes at 10.9 (GCS 9/2: 971–972) that the region of *India ulterior* is ‘inhabited by many and diverse languages and

Christian faith transcends *even* linguistic borders. The use of language diversity as an impediment to various forms of contact and transfer occurs in Augustine's *De ciuitate Dei* 19.7. In this famous passage (cf. e.g. Werner 1992: 15; Fögen 2000: 36; Lafferty 2003: 24–25; Formigari 2004: 83), Augustine discusses the societal entity constituted by the world in its entirety, which he identifies as 'the third level of human society' (*tertium gradum ... societatis humanae*), after the household (*domus*) and the city (*urbs*).¹³ He argues that the world poses all the more threats to a Christian way of life exactly because of its greater size (when compared to the household and the city),¹⁴ and then singles out linguistic diversity as the primary reason for these threats. He argues that 'the diversity of languages (*linguarum diuersitas*) now divides man from man (*hominem alienat ab homine*)'; and that

if two men, each ignorant of the other's language, meet (*si duo sibimet inuicem fiant obuiam ... quorum neuter linguam nouit alterius*), and are compelled by some necessity not to pass on but to remain with one another, it is easier for dumb animals, even of different kinds, to associate together (*sociantur*) than for these men, even though both are human beings (*cum sint homines ambo*). For when men cannot communicate their thoughts to each other (*quae sentiunt inter se communicare non possunt*), they are completely unable to associate with one another despite the similarity of their nature (*nihil prodest ad consociandos homines tanta similitudo naturae*); and this is so simply because of the diversity of their language (*propter solam diuersitatem linguae*). So true is this that a man would more readily hold a conversation with his dog than with another man who is a foreigner.

First of all, it is clear from this passage that for Augustine, the capacity of language and speech is characteristic of the human species, and is as such

peoples (*multis uariisque linguis et gentibus*). Interestingly, he moves on by stating that 'no ploughshare of apostolic preaching had engraved' this far remote region, but that it 'took up the first seeds for this faith' only in the time of Constantine. Although this is very thin evidence, it may be implied in this passage that the preaching of Christian faith in *India ulterior* was at least hampered by the high degree of linguistic variety in that region.

¹³ For Augustine's views on human society as expressed in *De ciuitate Dei* 19, cf. Mathisen (1999b: 805), with further references.

¹⁴ The introductory portion of Augustine's exposition reads as follows: 'After the city or town comes the world, which the philosophers identify as the third level of human society. They begin with the household, progress to the city, and finally come to the world.'

a crucial difference between people and ('dumb') animals (Sect. 1.2, p. 47). In addition, language to Augustine's mind has an important societal value, as it is the factor which connects human beings to each other, as well as a prominent cognitive value, as it serves for people to communicate their mental perceptions to each other. It is within this frame of reference that linguistic diversity and difference become highly problematic realities. When as a consequence of language diversity, people become completely unable to communicate their mental perceptions to each other by way of a shared language, the very essence of human nature gets lost and people as it were become 'dumb' animals to each other. In the same way as Augustine perceives of language as the principal binder of human society (Sect. 1.1, p. 35), he is able to state that linguistic diversity alienates men from each other and thus makes human society impossible. This passage, which involves a very negative appraisal of linguistic diversity, is at first corroborated by what Augustine writes about the partially positive consequences of the monolingual policy of the Roman empire:

It is true that the Imperial City has imposed on subject nations not only her yoke but also her language (*non solum iugum, uerum etiam linguam ... imponeret*), as a bond of peace and society, so that there should be no lack of interpreters but a great abundance of them. But how many great wars, what slaughter of men, what outpourings of human blood have been necessary to bring this about!¹⁵

In accordance with the negative appraisal of linguistic diversity implied by the above use, Augustine in this passage initially provides a predominantly positive appraisal of a strictly monolingual situation. While language diversity leads to alienation and affects men in their very essence, the use of a single common language is conducive to peace and solidarity among humans. However, Augustine differentiates his judgment by emphasizing how hard it is to attain a state of monolingualism. The exclusive use of the Latin language had to be imposed by the Roman empire on the subject nations together with its 'yoke', and this imposition costed many wars and lives.¹⁶ Augustine's ambiguous evaluation of Latin monolingualism should probably be understood as an *aporia* standing in an apologetic (anti-imperial) tradition. This *aporia* involves that the negative

¹⁵ The passage was integrated in the pseudo-Augustinian *Contra philosophos* (CPL 360), *disputatio* 5.

¹⁶ On Augustine's attitude towards the *Imperium Romanum* generally, cf. Szidat (2004–2010).

effect of Babel is restricted or compensated by another negative characteristic of man subsequent to the Fall, namely his *libido dominandi*, which manifests itself clearly in the expansion of the Roman empire.

Language diversity is also presented as an impediment in *De doctrina Christiana* 2.5.6, where Augustine connects it to the propagation of faith and the circulation of the Bible. Having just dealt with the events of Babel (cf. above, p. 100), he presents language diversity as a problem with regard to the circulation of a correct version of the Bible (cf. Green 1995: xvi). He argues that

even the holy Bible ... after starting off in one language (*ab una lingua profecta*), in which it could have conveniently (*opportune*) been spread throughout the world, was circulated far and wide (*longe lateque diffusa*) in the various languages of translators (*per uarias interpretum linguas*) and in this way became known to the Gentiles for their salvation.

Although Augustine does not seem to evaluate Bible translations in a negative way, it can be inferred from this passage that in his opinion, it might have been preferable, with an eye to the efficient circulation of the Bible, to maintain a single version of it in its original language. It is remarkable and exceptional that in suggesting this, Augustine explicitly connects the textual perspective to the language-historical perspective, more specifically to the events of Babel.

In a very different context, the use of language diversity as an impediment briefly occurs in Boethius' *Philosophiae consolatio* 2.7.7, which is strongly inspired by Cicero's philosophical works (Gruber 2006: 218), and where Boethius has Lady Philosophy relativize the ideal of earthly honour and fame. Having argued that the range of glory on earth is geographically very restricted, Lady Philosophy specifies that within this restricted space, the spread of fame is again hampered by a number of cultural and material factors:

Consider also that in this little habitable enclosure there live many nations (*plures incolunt nationes*), different in language and customs and in their whole ways of life (*lingua, moribus, totius uitiae ratione distantes*); because of the difficulties of travel, and differences of language (*loquendi diuersitate*), and the rarity of trading contacts, the fame not merely of individual men but even of cities cannot reach them all.

In the context of this philosophical consideration on the futility of worldly fame, language diversity is presented as one of the cultural and/or material factors setting limits on the spread of fame. Within this line of rhetoric, linguis-

tic diversity allegedly hinders communication among humans and thus slows down the circulation of a human's, or even a city's reputation.

3 Language Diversity as an Analogy to Religious Heterodoxy

The present section is concerned with those occasions where early Christian Latin authors, within the context of a larger argument, use language diversity as an analogy to religious heterodoxy (cf. Carruthers 2009: 48).¹⁷ The analogy between linguistic diversity and religious heterodoxy is made by Augustine in *Enarrationes in Psalmos* 30.2.3.8, where he comments on the psalm verse *proteges eos in tabernaculo tuo, a contradictione linguarum* (Ps. 30:21). Augustine explains that the tent (*tabernaculum*) mentioned in this verse stands for the Church, which he says is in the present age still travelling on earth. He goes on to explain that in this tent, God will protect the faithful from 'wrangling tongues', and that

wrangling tongues there are a lot (*contradicunt linguae multae*). Various heresies and schisms set up their din; many tongues contradict true teaching (*linguae multae contradicunt ueraci doctrinae*); as for you, you must run to God's tent; hold fast to the Catholic Church and do not depart from the rule of truth; then you will be shielded in the tent from wrangling tongues.

In this passage, Augustine does not directly connect religious heterodoxy to linguistic diversity or particularism, as he frequently does in his anti-Donatist discourse (Sect. 6.3, p. 205f.). However, by way of the metonymical relation between 'tongue' and 'language' (*lingua*), there is an inevitable link between

¹⁷ A vague instance can be found in the works of Jerome, who possibly constructs an association between heresy and linguistic diversity in the polemical, antihetical context of *Aduersus Iouinianum* 2.37 (PL 23: 335) (cf. Jeanjean 1999: 31–37; Hunter 2007: 231–234). Stating that Christian faith has existed for almost 400 years at the time when he is writing, Jerome elaborates on the 'tunic of Christ' as an image for Christian faith when arguing that 'since that time, countless heresies have torn His tunic to pieces, and almost the entire aberration (*uniuersus pene error*) came forth from the Chaldean, Syriac and Greek language (*de Chaldaeo et Syro et Graeco sermone*)'. Most probably, Jerome's mention of Chaldean (Aramaic), Syriac and Greek refers to the Christian traditions which have developed in these languages, and which in Jerome's presentation have produced a higher amount of heterodox teachings than the Latin tradition (cf. King 2009: 212).

the multiplicity of wrangling tongues, the variety of languages, and religious heterodoxy in the form of schism and heresy. In this connection, it is interesting to note that in *In Iohannis euangelium tractatus* 6.3, Augustine emphasizes that the divided tongues of the Pentecost wonder should not be taken to symbolize religious division. ‘The tongues are separate from each other (*distant inter se linguae*)’, he writes, ‘but the divisions of tongues do not represent schisms (*linguarum distantia non sunt schismata*)’.

The analogy between linguistic diversity and religious heterodoxy also occurs in two authors who were more than commonly familiar with Arian Christianity. Jordanes in his *Getica* 25.133 constructs a close connection between the Gothic language and the Arian stretch of Christianity.¹⁸ He argues that the Arian Visigoths preached to the kindred nations of Ostrogoths and Gepids and converted them to Arianism, and subsequently claims that the Visigoths ‘invited every nation of this language, in any place (*omnem ubique linguae huius nationem*) to the worship of this stretch of religion’. As the matter is presented by Jordanes, the spread of Arianism coincides with the spread of the Gothic language. This suggests—but only suggests—a perceived or constructed association between heterodoxy and linguistic particularism. Isidore in *Quaestiones in uetus testamentum* Gen. 9.3–4 makes a similar use of linguistic diversity when offering an ecclesiological reading of the Babel narrative (cf. Riché 1972: 348; Curtius 1967: 452; Eskhult 2014: 311–312, 324). He argues that in the same way as the Babelites were divided due to the confusion of languages (cf. above, pp. 114–116),

so too the heretics, who are through confusion separated from the one faith, are dissociated among themselves (*inuicem secernuntur*) as it were through the dissonance of language (*quasi per dissonantiam linguae*). And those whom the wicked agreement of an exalted conspiracy arms against God, a suddenly arising confusion divides again, when the discord of doctrines intervenes (*intercedente dogmatum discordia*).

Linguistic diversity and its origin are thus used as a biblical analogy to heretics, who not only separate themselves from the ‘Catholic’ Church but also gradually from each other, because of their inability to agree with others. This inability is presented as so compelling that it looks as if the ‘heretics’ are speaking different

¹⁸ On Arianism, cf. the references given above (p. 130). On the interconnections between Latin vs. Gothic liturgy and Catholic vs. Arian Christianity in late-4th-century Milan (Ambrose), cf. Lafferty (2003).

languages. Isidore moves on to elaborate rhetorically on the role of the Church in the opposition to heretics, which is analogous to the place of the single primeval language (Ch. 2) as opposed to post-Babelic linguistic diversity. While the Babelites and the heretics have in common the inability to agree with each other, due to the variety in their languages and their teachings respectively, Isidore points out the continuing unity as the correspondence between the primeval language—Hebrew in his opinion—and the ‘Catholic’ Church. Just as the one primeval language remained in the house of the godly Heber while the wicked Babelites were punished by a diversity of languages, so too only the ‘true’ faith of the Catholic Church remains one while all deviant teachings are scattered by internal discordance. The ecclesiogical context in which the Babel narrative is used as an analogy clearly indicates the underlying negative appraisal of linguistic diversity.

4 The Surmounting of Language Diversity as an Indicator of the Universal Spread of Christian Faith

The second section of this chapter was devoted to the use of language diversity as an impediment to various forms of contact and transfer. The assumption that language diversity hampers contact and transfer also underlies the use of language diversity which will be discussed in the present section. The use at issue emphasizes the universal spread of Christianity by drawing attention to the various nations and languages which have already been incorporated by it—in spite of the obstacle posed to the propagation of faith by linguistic diversity. This concords with a broader line of argument in early Christian discourse, which contrasts ‘race’ to ‘universalism’ (Buell 2002).

Jerome: Language Diversity and the Triumph of Christianity

Jerome highlights the universality of Christian faith by referring to the diversity of languages under its sway in § 1.1 of *Ep. 106*, a letter addressed to Sunnia and Fretela, two (possibly fictitious) Gothic clergymen who had allegedly consulted Jerome about a number of obscure passages in the psalms (Thompson 1966: 138–144; Fürst 2003: 119, 215). Jerome praises his addressees by proclaiming that in them, the words of Ps. 18:5—*in omnem terram exiit sonus eorum et in fines orbis terrae uerba eorum*—have been fulfilled. He then rhetorically asks:

Who would believe that the barbarian language of the Getes (*barbara Getarum lingua*) would ask for the Hebrew truth (*Hebraicam quaereret ueritatem*) and that exactly the Germanic world (*ipsa Germania*) would

investigate the utterances of the Holy Spirit while the Greek are falling asleep, or better, are disputing?

In Jerome's presentation, Sunnia and Fretela symbolize the universality of Christian faith, as they personally transcend the impediments of linguistic difference. The line of rhetoric in this triumphal evocation rests on the notion that the variety of languages within the Christian realm is a proof of the universal spread of faith (cf. Bardy 1948: 194–195). The same use occurs in *Ep. 60.4.1–2*, where Jerome contrasts the 'minimal' renown of the God of Judaism described in Ps. 75:2—*notus in Iudaea Deus, in Israhel magnum nomen eius*—to the universality of Christian faith (allegedly) prevailing in his own days. This universality is claimed not only in geographic and ethnic, but also in linguistic terms. Quoting Vergil's *Aeneid* (8.723), Jerome rhetorically asks where in the days of the God of Judah 'were those countless peoples and multitudes of such great nations 'unlike in tongue (*quam uariae linguis*), unlike in dress and tools'? To the contrary, he argues, 'now the voices and writings of all nations proclaim the passion and the resurrection of Christ'. Elaborating on this universality, he makes it plain that he means not only Hebrews, Greeks, and Romans—whose languages were applied on Christ's cross (Sect. 7.2, p. 233)—but also Indians, Persians, Goths and Egyptians (cf. Hilhorst 2007: 783). Even the 'fierce Bessians', he concludes, 'have broken out their harsh discord (*stridorem suum*) into the sweet music of the cross, and Christ is the one cry of the whole world'. A sense of Christian 'triumphalism' clearly permeates Jerome's use of linguistic diversity.

Augustine: An Exegetical Connection between 'Multicoloured Clothing' and Linguistic Diversity

The same use of linguistic diversity is rather prominent in the works of an author as central as Augustine. Remarkably, it consistently occurs in Augustine's exegesis of Old Testament passages which mention multicoloured articles of clothing. It can be suggested that this fact has certain implications for the way in which Augustine might conceive of language as a contingent (variable and diverse) 'dress' for the (uniform) ideas formulated in it. In *Contra litteras Petiliani* 2.104.238–239 Augustine develops his exegesis of the verse *tamquam unguentum in capite, quod descendit in barbam, barbam Aaron, quod descendit in oram uestimenti eius* (Ps. 132:2).¹⁹ Taking this verse as a symbol for

¹⁹ Cf. Quinot's note in BA (30: 544 n. 1): 'Au delà d'une exégèse allégorisante gratuite, reconnaissions la profondeur spirituelle de cette métaphore: sont dans l'unité, les disciples du

the universal Church, Augustine explains that it is in Jerusalem that the ointment (*unguentum*)—as a symbol for faith—starts to run down and that from the collar of the garment (*oram uestimenti*) onwards, ‘the entire unity (*unitas tota*) is interwoven (*contextitur*) throughout all the nations (*per omnes gentes*)’. He argues furthermore that by way of the collar, ‘the head entered into the garment, so that Christ would be dressed by the variety of the entire world (*uarietate orbis terrarum*)’ and that in this collar, ‘the very variety of languages (*uarietas ipsa linguarum*) manifested itself’. Augustine thus explicitly connects the clothing imagery of the psalm verse at issue to the unity and universality of faith. In Augustine’s exegesis, the variety of languages dominated by the Church is presented as an indicator, and in a sense even as a ‘trophy’, of its unity and universality.

A comparable use of linguistic diversity can be identified in *Sermo* 8.16, where Augustine comments on Ex. 12:35, which describes how the Israelites, at Moses’ command, ‘asked from the Egyptians (*ab Aegyptiis*) vessels of silver and gold (*uasa argentea et aurea*) and very much clothing (*uestemque plurimam*)’. Key to Augustine’s exegesis (cf. *De doctrina Christiana* 2.11.16–42.63, 3.1.1–4.8) is the notion that the Egyptians symbolize the secular world surrounding the Christians, who are in turn prefigured by the Israelites (cf. Bartelink 1964: 9–10; Di Berardino 1986: 139; Allen 2008). In developing this line of exegesis, Augustine argues that the gold of the Egyptians symbolizes the sages, their silver the men of eloquence, and their clothing the variety of languages existing in the secular world (*uarietates linguarum ipsorum*). Augustine elaborates on the latter connection by stating that the clothes ‘are the various languages (*linguae sunt uariae*), in which the senses in a certain way are dressed (*quibus quodam modo sensus induuntur*)’. The implication of Augustine’s exegesis is that secular philosophy and eloquence should be adopted and Christianized, but also that Christian faith is continually expanding and absorbing new languages and nations. Augustine connects this expansion of the Church to the triumphal words of Ps. 18:4, which has it that ‘there are no utterances nor words whose voices will not be heard’.

A similar use of language diversity—in a particular polemical context—is documented in *Sermo* 24D/360A, a sermon directed against the Donatists and the pagans. In §2 Augustine quotes Ps. 44:13–14—‘the queen has taken her stand at your right hand, in a garment of cloth of gold, and robed in many colours (*circumamicta uarietate*)’—and interprets the queen’s *uarietas uestis*

Christ (la tête) qui, en continuité avec la génération apostolique (la barbe) vivent selon l’Évangile de l’Esprit (le col du vêtement), dans toutes les nations (la robe).

in terms of language diversity. He argues that the many colours of the queen's gown symbolize 'the great number of languages' (*numerositas linguarum*) and rhetorically elaborates on this that people of different nations—*Latini, Graeci, Punici, Hebraei, Syri, Indi, Cappadoces, Aegyptii*—all speak in a different way. Augustine subsequently contrasts the variety of colour in the queen's gown to the unity of its texture. This opposition is meant to symbolize the opposition between linguistic diversity on the one hand and unity of faith on the other:

Variety in colour (*uarietas in colore*), but unity in weave (*unitas in textu*). Many colours, I mean to say (*multi enim colores*), all included in the one woven cloth (*textus unitate conclusi*), embroider it (*depingunt*), they do not tear it (*non scindunt*). Variety of languages (*uarietas linguarum*), but no variety of doctrines (*sed non uarietas doctrinarum*). Variety of speech (*uarietas locutionis*), but unity of charity (*sed unitas caritatis*).

As is shown by Augustine's 'inverted' use of the analogy between heterodoxy and linguistic diversity (cf. Carruthers 2009: 48; and above, Sect. 4.3, p. 136f.), the image of the queen's gown is evidently part of Augustine's anti-Donatist discourse. The Donatists are often argued by Augustine to isolate themselves—as a separate 'Punic' or 'African' Church—from the 'Catholic' Church, and in this way to give rise to a schism (cf. Tholen 2010: 128–129).²⁰ Within this polemical context, linguistic diversity is presented as inferior to unity of faith. If the various colours on the gown are said to 'embroider' (*depingunt*) the one woven cloth, this does not so much indicate a positive appraisal of language diversity, but rather a presentation of language diversity as a 'trophy' to the triumphal unity of 'Catholic' Christian faith.

This presentation of language diversity as a 'trophy' is more evident in *Enarrationes in Psalmos* 44.24, which is a similar but more straightforward interpretation of the queen's gown (cf. Carruthers 2009: 45–46). Augustine states that the queen's gown, which is 'of varied colours' (*uarius*), symbolizes the mysteries of Christian doctrine as well as the variety of languages in which they are expressed (*in linguis omnibus uariis*), namely 'African' (*Afra*, i.e. Punic), Syriac, Greek, Hebrew, and so on. He argues that these languages make up (*faciunt*) the variety (*uarietatem*) of the queen's gown, and that

²⁰ Augustine interprets the queen's gown in a similar way in *Enarrationes in Psalmos* 44.25, 44.29; *De fide rerum inuisibilium* 5 and 6. This line of exegesis is also integrated by Quodvultdeus, *Sermo* 6.5.4: *Ipsa est regina quae astitit a dextris tuis in uestitu deaurato, circumamicta uarietate, linguarum diuersarum gentium uarietate decorata*.

just as all the different colours in a dress (*omnis uarietas uestis*) harmonize to form a unity (*in unitate concordat*), so do all these languages express the one faith (*omnes linguae ad unam fidem*). Let there be plenty of variety in the garment (*in ueste uarietas sit*), but no tear made (*scissura non sit*).

As in *Sermo 24D/360A* (cf. above, p. 140f.), Augustine argues that while Christian doctrine is taught in various languages, it is always the same faith that is being taught. Linguistic diversity is symbolized by the *uarietas* of the queen's gown, while the unity of faith is represented by the gown itself, which is of one piece. Augustine's use of linguistic diversity in the present context implies that the languages together belong to a spiritual entity that is multifarious but harmonious. In line with his anti-Donatist rhetoric, Augustine furthermore argues that there should be plenty of diverse languages in the Christian world, as long as no doctrinal division ensues. In what follows Augustine seems to make a slight exegetical shift, due to which the gold in the queen's gown occupies a place analogous to that formerly held by the queen's gown as a whole, thus expressing the unity of faith (cf. Carruthers 2009: 47–48). Augustine argues that the gold in the queen's gown symbolizes Christian wisdom, which always remains one and the same, regardless of the number of diverse languages in which it is discussed (*quaelibet sit uarietas linguarum*). He specifies that linguistic diversity does affect the way in which the wisdom is spoken about, but not the wisdom itself (cf. Sect. 4.1, p. 125f.). It is clear that to Augustine's mind, the absolute Christian wisdom—the gold—by far surpasses the variety of languages—the coloured cloth—in which it is preached.

Prosper, Venantius Fortunatus, Avitus

The use of language diversity in demonstrating the universal spread of Christianity passingly occurs in the works of three more 'peripheral' authors. Firstly, Prosper of Aquitaine in *De uocatione omnium gentium* 2.14 (PL 51: 699C) proposes the typological interpretation according to which the Babelic confusion of languages prefigures Christianity, which was to gather dispersed mankind 'within the structure of that building where'—in the words of Is. 45:23 and Phil. 2:10–11—"every knee bows" to God 'and every tongue confesses that Jesus is in the glory of the Father'. As Borst (1958: 419) points out, it is remarkable that Prosper does not oppose Pentecost to Babel as the 'unifying factor'. It is the Babelic differentiation of languages itself that signifies God's universal salvific will and the 'call of all nations'. This is clearly in accordance with the global argument of *De uocatione omnium gentium*, which reinterprets and perpetuates Augustine's thought on salvation (cf. McHugh 1999b). By integrating Phil.

2:10–11 (Is. 45:23) into his exegesis, Prosper presents the variety of languages included in the Christian realm as indicative of God's universal salvific will.

A second instance is Venantius Fortunatus, who in *Vita sancti Martini* 3.496–498 sings the merits of the apostle Paul (cf. Riché³ 1972: 319). He writes that Paul preached among the nations of Europe, Asia, and Africa or—in other words—in the four quarters of the world. In order to emphasize the universality of Paul's preaching, Fortunatus inserts a catalogue of nations defined by the languages they speak:

Instructed by the teaching of such men, the Hebrew, the Greek, the Roman, the barbarian and the Indian confess the gifts of Christ; the Israelite sings them, together with the Athenian and the Quirite.

The surmounting of linguistic diversity is thus used as an indicator of the universal spread of Christian faith.²¹ Third and lastly, Avitus of Vienne in *Homiliae* 11.2 connects the universal spread of Christianity to the trilingual inscription on Christ's cross (Sect. 7.2, p. 232f.). He writes that the inscription was composed in Hebrew, Greek and Latin, 'in order that the entire world would believe without delay ... what was subsequently confessed by every language (*omnis lingua confiteretur*), namely that our Lord Jesus is in the glory of God the Father'. The limited multiplicity of the three languages on top of Christ's cross is thus presented as indicative of the initial stage of the universal spread of Christianity, across all the world's languages.

Cassiodorus: The Integration of Augustine's Exegesis

A similar use of language diversity can be identified on two occasions in Cassiodorus' works. While an Augustinian influence is probable in the former case, it is certain in the latter. In *Expositio Psalmorum* pref. 2 Cassiodorus refers to 1 Par. 23:5, where it is described how four thousand youths from the people of

²¹ On a couple of occasions, Fortunatus refers to diversity of languages as suggestive of his addressee's universal fame. *Carmen* 3.4 to Felix, bishop of Nantes, is closed in §13 by the statement: 'Even if both the Greek and the Latin language were summoned, they would not be able to pay off the debt for all your merits'. In *Carmen* 6.2.7–8 on king Charibert, he states that 'on this side the barbarian world (*barbaries*), on the other side the Romanized world (*Romania*) applauds him' and that 'in various languages, it is the same praise that resounds for this man'. There is no explicit appraisal of language diversity in these passages, but the reference to linguistic diversity in order to emphasize the universality of one's fame suggests that linguistic diversity is in itself an impediment to the spread of fame.

Israel have to perform psalms with various musical instruments and their own voice.²² Cassiodorus explains that the ‘sweet union’ these youths produce consists of three parts, namely the human voice, the musical instruments, and the harmony between both of these. He subsequently interprets the performance of the youths as an announcement of ‘the Catholic Church, which out of various languages (*ex diuersis linguis*) and with a variegated harmony (*uarioque concantu*) was to believe in the one unity of faith’. In other words, the unity of faith creates harmony out of the diversity of languages, and the surmounting of linguistic diversity is thus a trophy to the unity of faith.

Further on in the same work, at 44.10 (CCSL 97: 410), Cassiodorus integrates Augustine’s interpretation of the queen’s gown (Ps. 44:13–14) with reference to linguistic diversity. He proposes to examine why the Church is praised ‘in the variety of the gown, while it is the whole, singular and one that befits the Church’. He moves on by explaining that the gown here signifies ‘the variety (*uarietatem*), or the numerous languages (*linguas multiplices*), since every nation sings psalms in Church for the Creator according to its native language (*secundum suam patriam*)’. Commenting at 71.11 on the verse *Et adorabunt eum omnes reges terrae; omnes gentes seruient ei*, Cassiodorus argues that by *omnes gentes seruient ei*, David—who in his opinion composed all the psalms (O’Donnell 1979: 139, 148)—referred to ‘all the nations which are divided across the world by their languages and their countries’. It becomes particularly clear that Cassiodorus is drawing on Augustine for this line of interpretation (O’Donnell 1979: 137; Carruthers 2009: 46), when he argues that it is thus shown that ‘the treachery of Donatus has been convicted, who thinks of the Church as something local (*localem*), while it is for sure that it is spread over the entire world’.

Gregory the Great

Gregory the Great, too, uses the surmounting of linguistic diversity as an indicator of the universal spread of Christianity.²³ In *Moralia in Job* 6.32.50 he explains the verse part *sed cum lapidibus regionum pactum tuum* (Job 5:23) with reference to linguistic diversity, writing that the regions divided over the world symbolize ‘the Churches of the nations that are part of the one faith, but are divided by the diversity of customs and languages (*morum linguarumque diuer-*

²² On the theme of musical instruments in Cassiodorus’ and Augustine’s exegesis of the psalms generally, cf. van Deusen (1989: 201–255).

²³ Cf. Markus (1997: 73): ‘The multiplicity of churches necessarily made the Church a ‘concordant diversity of members’ (*concors membrorum diversitas*). ‘Safeguarding the unity of the sacrament, the Church gathers together the faithful peoples according to the manifold variety of their customs (*mores*) and languages.’

sitate'). At 27.11.21 he proclaims the triumph of Christianity by stating that 'the almighty Lord has already penetrated the hearts of almost all nations' and that 'He has joined the boundaries of East and West in the one faith'. In order to illustrate this, Gregory argues that even the language of Britain (*lingua Britanniae*), 'which could do nothing else than gnash barbarian sounds (*barbarum frendere*)', has already long ago begun to resound Hebrew *alleluia* in sacred hymns. The fact that 'even' the language of the 'barbarous' British has adopted Hebrew words in order to confess Christian faith is thus presented as an indicator of the unstoppable spread of Christianity. Interestingly, the pejorative phrase *barbarum frendere* only denotes the sounds produced by the Angles prior to the arrival of Christianity, brought to them by Augustine of Canterbury (d. 604) on the authority of Gregory the Great himself (Baun 2013: 174). Now that they have been converted to Christianity, Gregory argues, the Angles have turned to religious songs in Hebrew. Rather than implying an actual linguistic shift, Gregory's statement involves that Britain's linguistic particularism has been made irrelevant by the unity of Christian faith.

Commenting at 30.6.22 on the verse *Quando fundabatur puluis in terram et glebae compingebantur* (Iob 38:38), Gregory furthermore argues that the lumps (*glebae*)—which are 'of the same dust but as it were divided by the separation of their mass'—symbolize the 'unity in diversity' of Christian faith, a characteristically Gregorian theme (cf. Meyvaert 1963). He writes that 'by preserving the unity of the sacrament', God 'gathers the nations faithful in the Church according to the variety of their customs and languages (*iuxta uarietatem morum atque linguarum*)'. The image of the lumps implies that linguistic diversity in the Christian world is merely accidental, while all of the Christian world is 'of the same matter'. Here again, Gregory seems to present the surmounting of cultural and linguistic diversity as an indicator of the universal spread of Christianity.²⁴

5 Language Diversity as an Adornment to the Human Mind

It has become clear in the above sections that nearly all of early Christian Latin authors' uses of linguistic diversity are based on a global negative evaluation of the reality. The only early Christian Latin author to evaluate language diversity in an outright positive way—as an 'adornment' to the human mind—appears

²⁴ It is also worthy of note that both in this passage and in *Moralia in Job* 6.32.50, *lingua* and *mores* are directly connected to each other (cf. Van Hal 2013a).

to be Augustine. Significantly, Augustine expresses an outright positive evaluation only twice, and in both cases the positive appraisal can be explained with reference to a stronger pagan influence than is common in Augustine's works.

In his dialogue *De quantitate animae*, which due to its early date (probably 388) is strongly influenced by pagan philosophy in general and by Augustine's Neoplatonist readings in particular (Marrou 1958: 34–35; Hadot 1971: 207), Augustine envisages to show that the soul 'does not have bodily quantity, but is, nonetheless, something great' (*Retractationes* 1.8.1). At 33.70–35.79 more specifically, Augustine discusses the 'seven degrees of the greatness of the soul' (Teske 1999, cf. Lütcke 1988). When dealing at 33.72 with the third degree, which is proper to humans, Augustine in a laudatory way deals with 'products' or 'manifestations' of the human soul, mentioning first memory, crafts, agriculture, architecture, and then moving on to 'the inventions of so many signs (*inuentiones tot signorum*) in letters, in words, ... in sounds of every kind'. Subsequently, Augustine approvingly refers to 'all those many languages of the nations' (*tot gentium linguas*) jointly with human institutions, and concludes by mentioning rhetoric and various sciences. In this early work, Augustine evaluates linguistic diversity in a positive way. In all its diversity, human language is one of the foremost manifestations of culture, and as such of the capacities of the human soul. Without any doubt, Augustine's positive appraisal is due to the early date of this work. It is Augustine the pagan rhetorician rather than the Catholic bishop who takes the floor here.

A similar argument and appraisal can be found in *Sermo 25D/36OB*, which dates to 404. The positive attitude towards language diversity can again be explained with reference to the direct historical context. As Dolbeau (1996: 243–244) and Markus (1999b: 503) point out, the sermon at issue was preached to an audience which exceptionally included pagans. When Augustine as late as 404 harks back to a 'secular', positive appraisal of linguistic diversity, he undoubtedly did so in order to convince the pagans among his audience that the God of the Christians is invisible but exists, as can be seen from His 'works'—in the same way as the human soul is invisible but is proven to exist by its wonderful 'products'. More specifically, Augustine argues in § 9 that the greatness of the soul—defined as 'a great force incorporeal in nature'—can only be measured from the works which are produced by the soul. He refers to the impressive human realizations in the domains of agriculture, administration, architecture, and arts and crafts, but also to 'the multitude of languages (*copiam linguarum*), the depth of memory, and the copiousness of eloquence'. All of these are presented as great 'works' of the soul, indicating the greatness of the soul itself, when Augustine exclaims: 'How great are the works of the soul, which you can see, while you cannot see the soul itself!'

When Augustine uses the verb form *mirare*, asks 'What is it that delights (*delectat*) you about everyday human affairs?', and refers, among other things, to the numerosity of human languages, this implies a positive attitude towards language diversity, as a 'wonderful' product of the human soul.

Augustine's appraisal of language diversity is a more differentiated, though still preponderantly positive one in *De doctrina Christiana* 2.26.40 (dating to 396/397), by contrast to 2.5.6 of the same work (cf. above, p. 135). As in *De quantitate animae*, Augustine is dealing here with human institutions, some of which, he writes, 'are modelled on natural ones or at any rate similar to them'. He furthermore argues that whereas those institutions 'which involve an alliance with demons' are to be rejected, those which men have in common with each other are generally to be accepted. Augustine then states that the latter principle primarily applies to the letters of the alphabet (Sect. 10.1, p. 342f.), since these allow us to read, but also, 'up to a certain point (*quantum satis est*), to the multiplicity of languages (*linguarumque uarietas*)'. The 'acceptance' of linguistic diversity is thus liable to a restriction; it is only to be adopted 'insofar as it is not immoderate (*luxuriosa*) and superfluous (*superflua*)'. This phrase seems to suggest that not linguistic diversity itself, but an individual's multilingual competence which exceeds the average or is put to wrong usage can be a manifestation of idle arrogance (Ch. 5, p. 150f.). Still, it is remarkable that linguistic diversity, which in book 16 of *De ciuitate Dei* is presented as the result of the punishment of the evil tower-builders, is in *De doctrina Christiana* dealt with as a purely human institution, without an explicit connection to 'demons'. Augustine's ambiguous attitude towards linguistic diversity should probably be explained by his belief that it is an indirect consequence of the Fall, but at the same time a historical reality which cannot be but willed by God. The conflict between Augustine's pagan education on the one hand and his Christian vocation on the other may be considered a more remote background to this ambiguous attitude.

Summary

Although it has been shown in Chapter 3 that at least some authors interpret God's intervention at Babel in a slightly more optimistic way, the nearly inevitable implication of the Babel narrative is that language diversity is an undesirable reality, resulting from God's reaction against men's initiative. The purpose of the present chapter was to investigate to which uses this globally negative perception was put by early Christian Latin authors, and to ask whether there are any more positive appraisals of language diversity after all.

The first section dealt with those authors who quote language diversity as an allegedly futile circumstance when faced with various perceivedly or professedly superior realities. Linguistic (and ethnic) diversity is presented as a futility when faced with the universality of God's reign and of Christian faith (Pacian, Jerome, Augustine, *Collatio*, Quodvultdeus, Fulgentius of Ruspe). As to the doctrinal context for this notion, one can mention Augustine's use of it in his anti-Donatist rhetoric, where it is combined to Paul's image of the Body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:27). A different doctrinal context can be identified in the *Collatio*, where it is made a part of a Nicene, anti-Arian line of rhetoric. In the works of Augustine, the diversity of human languages, by its conventionality, is frequently presented as a futility when compared to 'reality' (concept or referent). Apart from this general use, I have discussed several specific cases where it is connected to a particular theological or exegetic point. This shows that Augustine really deploys the variability and futility of human language as a rhetorical device. The contrast between the identity of thought and the variability of human language—a typically Aristotelian position—is also elaborated on by Boethius.

The second section was devoted to those authors who in their exposition or argument employ the view that language diversity is an impediment to various forms of contact and transfer, generally speaking. Rufinus seems to imply that language diversity is an impediment to the propagation of faith, while Augustine expressly states that it alienates humans from each other and in this way harms the cohesion of human society. Furthermore, Augustine seems to believe that a single, monolingual Bible version might have been preferable for the propagation of faith. Boethius, lastly, contends that language diversity hinders the spread of worldly fame.

In the third section, I have discussed passages where an analogy is constructed between language diversity on the one hand and religious heterodoxy on the other. Such an analogy is clearly visible when Augustine interprets the *contradictio linguarum* from Ps. 30:21 in terms of the heresies and schisms which contradict 'true doctrine', and when he elsewhere emphasizes that the divided tongues of Pentecost do not symbolize schisms. Furthermore, Jordanes constructs an association between the Visigothic language and Arianism, while Isidore interprets the events of Babel as a symbol for heretics who not only deviate from 'the one faith' but also from each other. An underlying notion for this differentiated use of language diversity might be that teachings developed in languages other than Latin and Greek are hard of control and as such potentially dangerous.

In the fourth section I have dealt with those cases where the authors refer to the surmounting of language diversity as an indicator of the universal spread

of Christian faith. This line of rhetoric is obviously based on the notion discussed in Section 4.2, namely that language diversity is an impediment to the spread of Christianity. It also connects to some of the cases discussed in Section 4.1, where language diversity is presented as a futility when compared to the universality of Christianity and its God. The theme is elaborated upon by Jerome, Prosper, Venantius Fortunatus, Avitus, and Gregory the Great, who quote remote nations and their obscure languages in order to rhetorically amplify the universality of faith. Augustine inserts the commonplace in his exegesis of the multicoloured articles of clothing occurring in the Old Testament, most importantly in Ps. 44:13–14 (*regina circumamicta uarietate*). The global line of interpretation—taken up later on by Cassiodorus—is that the various colours of the one gown symbolize the various languages in the universal Church and that correspondingly, linguistic diversity embellishes the one faith (as a kind of ‘trophy’), but does not divide it. Again, this exegesis is made part of Augustine’s anti-Donatist rhetoric.

In the fifth and final section, I have tried to find out whether there are also positive appraisals of language diversity in Christian Latin literature. The only two instances of an outright positive appraisal were found in Augustine’s *De quantitate animae*, an early dialogue which is still strongly influenced by pagan philosophy, and in his *Sermo 25D/36OB*, pronounced for a gathering where pagans were admitted. These contextual factors suggest that when Augustine proclaims language as one of the great works of the soul, this is anything but a characteristically ‘Christian’ point of view.

Appraisals and Uses of Multilingual Competence

Whereas Chapter 4 was concerned with early Christian Latin authors' appraisals and uses of the reality of linguistic diversity, the present chapter deals with their attitudes towards (and uses of) multilingual competence as a means by which to counter this reality.¹ As was already pointed out in the Introduction (p. 10), the linguistic horizon of the 'Latin West' was considerably altered and widened by the rise of Christianity and the introduction of the Bible. On the one hand, Western intellectuals became (better) aware of the existence of the biblical languages Hebrew and Aramaic, while on the other, the necessity of preaching and the propagation of faith compelled Churchmen to acquire at least a notion of local languages or varieties of Latin. This involved a considerable change with regard to the linguistic ideal of 'classical Rome' (broadly speaking), which was essentially bilingual²—Latin and Greek—and virtually excluded other languages (Lejeune 1948, Werner 1992, Rochette 1995, Van Hal 2009). A *status quo* for the 'classical' situation can be gleaned from the educational advice given by Quintilian (35–100 AD) in *Institutio oratoria* 1.1.12–14:³

I prefer a boy to begin by speaking Greek (*a sermone Graeco puerum incipere malo*), because he will imbibe Latin (*quia Latinum ... perbibet*), which more people speak, whether we want it or not; and also because he will need to be taught Greek learning first, as it is the source of our learning too. However, I do not want a fetish to be made of this, so that he spends a long time speaking and learning nothing but Greek, as is commonly done. This gives rise to many faults both of pronunciation owing to the distortion of the mouth produced by forming foreign sounds, and of

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- 1 The discussion and evaluation of multilingual competence is related in a number of ways to ancient or late antique discussions of (il)literacy, cf. (e.g.) Grundmann (1958), Harris (1989), and Bartelink (2003).
 - 2 One immediately thinks of Horace's famous phrase (*Carmen* 3.8.5) on Maecenas: *docte sermones utriusque linguae*. Classic studies on bilingualism in antiquity are Kaimio (1979), Dubuisson (1981a, 1981b), and Rochette (1997a [cf. 1996, 1998a]). Fögen (2003) provides a bibliography devoted in part to bi- and multilingualism in Graeco-Roman antiquity. For a survey of famous polyglots in Roman antiquity, one can consult Laes (2013).
 - 3 For a discussion of the methods used in teaching Greek to native speakers of Latin, cf. Germain (2008: 43–47).

language (*oris plurima uitia in peregrinum sonum corrupti et sermonis*), because the Greek forms stick in the mind through continual usage (*Graecae figurae assidua consuetudine haeserunt*) and persist obstinately even in speaking the other language. So Latin ought to follow not far behind, and soon proceed side by side with Greek (*non longe itaque Latina subsequi debent et cito pariter ire*). The result will be that, once we begin to pay equal attention to both languages (*cum aequali cura linguam utramque tueri coepimus*), neither will get in the way of the other (*neutra alteri officiat*).

Several important points can be gathered from this extensive quotation. First of all, the passage shows that a fluent competence in both Latin and Greek occupied a central place in the educational ideal, at least for the upper-class Roman male (cf. *puer*). Second, this quotation indicates the prominence given to ‘habit’ or ‘usage’ (*consuetudo*) in acquiring and retaining the mastery of a foreign language. Third, it shows the chronological priority of Greek over Latin in the process of language learning, next to Quintilian’s warning—against what was possibly ‘common practice’—that one should not wait too long to start learning Latin, because of a risk of ‘corruption’ or ‘interference’ (cf. Adams 2003: 9, 435–436). More specifically, it can be gathered from this passage that an accomplished mastery of a language demonstrates itself in a flawless and allegedly ‘native’ pronunciation—certainly due to the purpose of delivering an accomplished orator—and that one should avoid the traces of Greek in the pronunciation of Latin. The belief that a ‘native’ proficiency was the standard for an accomplished mastery of a foreign language could easily be turned into a commonplace compliment, most importantly in dedicatory and epistolary contexts (Sect. 5.6, p. 187f.). A classic example can be found in *Ep. 4.3.5* by Pliny the Younger (61–c.113 AD):

Is such Greek possible for a Roman (*hominemne Romanum tam Graece loqui*)? Athens herself, believe me, could not be so Attic (*non medius fidius ipsas Athenas tam Atticas dixerim*). In fact I envy the Greeks because you have preferred to write in their language (*inuideo Graecis quod illorum lingua scribere maluisti*); for it is easy to guess how you could express yourself in your native idiom (*quid sermone patrio exprimere possis*) when you can produce such masterpieces in a foreign and acquired tongue (*cum hoc insiticio et inducto tam praeclara opera perfeceris*).

We will encounter a number of variations on this commonplace. In the present chapter, the ‘classical’ situation as reflected in the quotation from Quintilian will serve as a benchmark by which to measure the changes taking place in

early Latin Christianity. First of all, the present chapter will investigate (1) how the authors conceive of the process of learning foreign languages, and which issues or problems they mention in describing this process.⁴ Subsequently, it will deal with the different contexts within which multilingual competence could be valued, successively investigating which authors value multilingual competence (2) in the context of (Bible, literary, scientific) translation, (3) in the context of theological discourse and biblical exegesis, (4) in the pragmatic-ecclesiastical context of preaching and the propagation of faith, (5) in the context of ('elegant') conversation, government, and political negotiation, and (6) as an inherently valuable skill in laudatory contexts (epistolary or dedicatory). Lastly, specific attention will be paid to those passages (7) where the multilingual competence of women is discussed and evaluated, since this was most probably an uncommon phenomenon in (late) antiquity.

1 Process and Problems of Foreign Language Learning

Early Christian Latin authors quite frequently comment on the process of learning a foreign language and on the issues and difficulties that are connected to it. An indirect but valuable testimony is given by Filastrius of Brescia. In *Diuersarum hereseon liber* 104.4 Filastrius describes the heretic view according to which God punished mankind for building a tower in Babel by depriving it of its former effortless multilingual competence (Sect. 6.1, p. 199). Filastrius reports that according to this heresy, oblivion was sent in by God (*obliuione immissa*), who in this way created the normal boundaries for a human's multilingual competence. Focusing on the characteristics of a 'normal' process of foreign language study in order to contrast it to mankind's former effortless multilingualism, Filastrius presents this process as a very intensive one which requires effort (as opposed to *sine quodam labore*), study, and instruction (*per studium atque doctrinam*). The common extent of multilingual competence is estimated at a passive mastery of three or four languages (*ut tres quis aut quatuor ualeret ediscere*), and an active mastery of even less languages (*atque isdem uix eloqui*). This is probably one of the several instances where Filastrius offers his readers a glimpse of his own ideas when trying to elucidate and refute the opinion held by an obscure heresy (Sect. 2.2, p. 64f., and 3.1, p. 98f.).

⁴ Hüllen (2005: 28–30) briefly deals with foreign language learning in late antiquity. Note that I will not discuss the authors' views on first-language acquisition, unless they are relevant to their ideas on the acquisition of multilingual competence.

Jerome on the Difficulty of Learning Hebrew and Aramaic

Throughout his works, Jerome frequently comments on the process of learning foreign languages and on the difficulties inherent to this process. As for the study of Hebrew and Aramaic, this undoubtedly relates to a self-promoting rhetoric which allows him to emphasize the sacrifices he had to make in order to provide a new Bible translation. In the preface to his translation of Isaiah, Jerome expresses the hope that he will be rewarded in the afterlife for his laborious study of the Hebrew language. By means of the verb *sudasse*—‘to have sweated’—and by stating that he deserves a reward (*merces*), he suggests that learning Hebrew is a demanding enterprise.

The same suggestion emerges from *Ep. 30.2.2*, a letter addressed to his female pupil Paula (Sect. 5.7, p. 189f.). At her request, Jerome is about to provide mystical explanations of the letters of the Hebrew alphabet (Sect. 10.3, p. 372f.). He reminds Paula that he has already given these explanations orally, but admits that everything he said ‘slips away from the memory, because of the barbarity (*barbaries*) of the language’. In the preface to *Commentarii in epistulas Paulinas Gal. 3* (CCSL 77A: 157–158) Jerome complains about the harmful effect of Hebrew on his mastery of Latin. He states that

a hiss which is due to my Hebrew readings (*stridor lectionis Hebraicae*) has polluted (*sordidauit*) the entire elegance of my speech (*sermonis elegantiā*), and the grace of my Latin eloquence (*Latini eloquii uenustatem*) ... I leave to others to judge of the progress I have made with the indefatigable study of that language (*ex linguae illius infatigabili studio*); what I have lost in my own language, I know very well myself (*ego quid in mea amiserim, scio*).

This quotation evidences Jerome’s belief that one’s gradual progress in the mastery of a foreign, barbarian language almost inevitably involves ‘corruption’ or ‘interference’ in the mastery of one’s native language (Juhász 1970; Adams 2003: 17, 277). The phrasing he uses suggests a strong opposition between the supposed ‘beauty’ of Latin and ‘ugliness’ of Hebrew (Sect. 7.4, p. 249f.). The final sentence of the quotation implies that the acquisition of a barbarian language, of Hebrew at any rate, is a slow and tiresome process, while the concomitant decay of one’s native language starts almost immediately. It could be suggested that apart from Jerome’s usual self-promoting rhetoric, this passage might also involve a rhetorical means to keep others at a distance from ‘his’ study of Hebrew.

Jerome also refers to this ‘corruption’ or ‘interference’ in the closing words of *Commentarii in prophetas minores Agg.* (2.21/24). In this topical excuse for

the alleged careless style of his commentary, he asks his reader not to look for elegance of speech (*eloquii uenustatem*), which he claims to have lost long ago due to his study of Hebrew. Likewise, in *Ep.* 29.7.2, he writes that by frequently reading Hebrew, his Latin has become so rusty (*rubiginem obduximus*) that even when he speaks, ‘a certain harshness resounds that is anything but Latin’ (*stridor quidam non Latinus interstrepatur*) (cf. Süss 1932: 13). It should be emphasized (1) that Jerome’s statement of course involves an important component of rhetorical gesture, and (2) that it indicates the importance of reading (Johnson & Parker 2009, Johnson 2010)—perhaps in particular reading out loud—as a form of *consuetudo* by which to maintain one’s grasp of a language, i.e. one’s ‘native’ pronunciation of it.

In the preface to his translation of Daniel, Jerome describes how hard he found it to learn Aramaic during his solitary stay in the desert of Chalcis (Adams 2003: 269, 294; Millar 2010: 63–64). He calls the study a *pistrinum*, literally a ‘pounding mill’ worked by horses or asses, and writes that the study cost him a lot of time and effort but yielded little result. He pictures the unease of finding his way in an alien language as a walk through a crypt, with only scattered light shining from above. The learning process is presented as an exceptionally hard one, involving tedium, desperation, and loss of confidence. One might wonder why Jerome found it so hard to learn a language which he elsewhere describes as an underdeveloped one (*Ep.* 7.2.1). Presumably, he wanted to suggest that exactly the alleged barbarity and ugliness of Aramaic made it a difficult language for a native speaker of the ‘elegant’ Latin language (Banniard 1988). Indeed, as is explained respectively by Harlow (1998) and by Andersson (1998), the widespread prejudices that ‘some languages are just not good enough’ and that ‘some languages are harder than others’ are—according to the ‘social connotations hypothesis’ (Sect. 7.4, p. 247f.)—inspired by sociocultural connotations attached to (the speakers of) a certain language rather than by an actual linguistic reality.⁵

Augustine on Foreign Language Learning and the Difficulty of Learning Greek (and the ‘Imitations’ by Paulinus of Pella and Isidore of Seville)

In order to emphasize the unnatural character of the apostles’ speaking in languages they previously did not know (Sect. 6.1, p. 199f.), Augustine in various Pentecost sermons—the relevant pericope from Acts preceding the sermons

5 On the vicissitudes of the competing and ‘politically correct’ though not unanimously supported scholarly view that ‘all languages are equally complex’, cf. Joseph & Newmeyer (2012).

concerned in the liturgy of the day—rhetorically elaborates on the number of languages humans are normally able to master in the course of their lifetime. In *Sermo* 299B.3 he stresses that the apostles spoke in languages which they did not know before, and specifies that ‘in their own nation they had learned one or maybe two languages’. In *Sermo* 162A.11 he states that a human ‘is hardly able to learn two or three’, or ‘at most three or four languages’, and emphasizes that the apostles spoke all these languages ‘immediately’ (*repente*), ‘not by learning them little by little’ (*non paulatim discentes*), thus suggesting that it is in this gradual and laborious way that foreign languages are normally learned (Werner 1992: 15). In *Sermo* 175.3 (cf. *Sermo* 80.5) Augustine writes that those people who heard the apostles were terrified, because they knew that the apostles

had been unlearned people (*homines idiotas*) who knew only one language; and they were amazed and afraid because people who knew only one language—or at the most two—spoke in the languages of all nations.

Augustine emphasizes the difficulty of acquiring multilingual competence in *De trinitate* 10.1.2. He makes it clear that it is highly desirable to understand and to speak the languages of all nations, but notes that since ‘almost’ all people lack the knowledge of all languages, ‘anyone applies himself most of all to knowing the language of his own nation’. Augustine goes into more detail on the process of learning foreign languages in § 5 of the preface to his *De doctrina Christiana* (cf. Banniard 1992a: 98). In this passage, which will be integrated by Isidore in a slightly modified version (cf. below, p. 157), Augustine writes that

anyone of us has learned his own language (*linguam suam didicisse*) from the beginning of childhood onwards (*ab ineunte pueritia*) by the habit of hearing it (*consuetudine audiendi*), and ... we have acquired (*accepisse*) some other language, Greek or Hebrew or whatever other language either, as with our native language (*similiter*), by hearing it (*audiendo*) or by way of a man that teaches it (*per hominem praceptorum*).

I will not try to add to or improve upon the extensive literature about Augustine’s views on the acquisition of one’s native language,⁶ but it is important

⁶ Language acquisition is dealt with by Augustine in *Confessiones* 1.6.8, 1.6.10, and 1.8.13. For discussions of this subject, cf. De Rijk (1968: 93–94), O’Donnell (1992: 36–41, 52–60), Wald (1993), Fögen (2000: 221), Thomas (2004: 39–40), Burton (2007: 173–175), Fuhrer (2009: 129–130), Toom (2009, 2010). The philosopher Wittgenstein (1889–1951) quotes part of *Confessiones*

to note that Augustine presents the process of learning foreign languages as analogous to first language acquisition.⁷ Both one's native language and foreign languages can be learned by being heard—in a 'natural' environment—or through linguistic training under the guidance of a teacher.

In one of the sections of *Confessiones* concerned with language learning from a personal perspective, Augustine deals with the time when he had to learn Greek, and with his dislike for this language (Neuschäfer 2004–2010: 1005). At 1.14.23 (cf. briefly at 1.13.20) Augustine asks himself—while addressing God in confession—why he actually hated Greek that much, and argues that what repelled him was 'the very difficulty of learning a foreign language at all' (*difficultas omnino ediscendae linguae peregrinae*). He specifies that his hatred for Greek was due, on the one hand, to the fact that he did not know any of the lexicon and, on the other, to the 'violent pressure' imposed on him by corporal punishment in the 'classroom'. Despite Quintilian's explicit advice to the contrary (1.3.14–17), corporal punishment remained standard practice in ancient education and gave rise to a commonplace in ancient literature on the topic, often symbolized by the 'schoolmaster's cane' or 'rod' (Kaster 1988: 175 n. 17; Chin 2008: 112). According to Augustine's testimony, the practice of corporal punishment only added to the difficulty of learning a foreign language *tout court*. Adopting more recent terminology of second language learning, it is possible to say that Augustine contrasts this explicit, 'forced' method of language teaching to his spontaneous, implicit, intuitive learning of the Latin language during the very first stages of language acquisition (cf. Ricucci 2015).

Augustine's account in his *Confessiones* seems to have inspired that of Ausonius' grandson, Paulinus of Pella (in Macedonia). In *Eucharisticos* 75–84 Paulinus comments on the difficulties allegedly involved with his own aspirations at a bilingual competence, inverting in a way the negative experience described by Augustine. Raised in a Greek-speaking environment (Bardy 1948: 183; Marrou 1965: 381), Paulinus states that even before he had reached the age of five, he had already been initiated in Greek literature, and soon afterwards also in Latin literature. He claims that he was first confronted with Latin literature even before he well understood the Latin language, as he was used to talking Greek to the servants who had to take care of him. As a consequence, he states, the task of learning Latin turned out to be too difficult for him. He claims that a bilingual education in Latin and Greek—which he designates by the

1.8.13 at the outset of his *Philosophische Untersuchungen* (1953), where he subsequently formulates his criticism of it (cf. e.g. Ayers 1979: 67–69; Kirwan 1994: 205–206).

⁷ Kelly (1976: 34–35, 310, 323, 404) offers scattered remarks on Augustine's 'method' of language teaching and learning.

phrases *doctrina duplex* and *geminus (que) ... splendore*—is suited to ‘more powerful minds’, whereas the ‘vein of his mind’ was allegedly ‘too barren’. It goes without saying that in the light of the direct context of *Eucharisticos*, a literary work in Latin verse, Paulinus’ testimony should not be interpreted too literally. Rather, it should be read as a *locus de modestia* intertwined with a literary allusion to Augustine’s complaint.

Isidore of Seville, then, in *Etym.* 9.1.10 comments on the process of foreign language learning by combining the authoritative accounts given by Augustine in *De doctrina Christiana* and *De trinitate* (Reydellet 1984: 38 n. 17, 38–39 n. 18). Isidore states that every human is able to learn (*accipere*) any language, either by hearing it (*audiendo*), or by ‘reading’ it (presumably out loud) with the help of a teacher (*legendō ex p̄aeceptōre*). In the same way as Augustine in his *De doctrina Christiana*, Isidore describes both types of language learning as analogous to each other. More precisely, it can be inferred that both first-language acquisition and foreign language learning may proceed either in a direct or in an indirect way. This process is presented as a universal one, applying to all humans and to all languages, without any differences in the learning process. Adding material from Augustine’s *De trinitate*, Isidore specifies that it is ‘difficult’ to acquire a command of all languages, but that any human should at least be able to learn the language of his own nation by immersion, or otherwise is ‘worse than brute beasts’. This harsh statement evidently relates to the common assumption that language is a distinctly human capacity (Sect. 1.2, p. 48).

The Bilingual Education of Fulgentius of Ruspe

The biographer of Fulgentius of Ruspe—formerly identified as Ferrandus, monk and deacon of the church of Carthage (Smith 1999: 373; Schneider 2002b: 274), but now definitively as a ‘pseudo-Ferrandus’ (Isola in CCSL 91F)—extensively discusses Fulgentius’ bilingual competence and the process of acquiring it in *Vita sancti Fulgentii* 1.4–5 (cf. Berschin 1980: 107). His account reminds the reader of the advice given by Quintilian, but does not actually follow it closely. The biographer describes how in the initial stage of his education (*primitus*), Fulgentius’ mother has him learn Greek very thoroughly (*imbuendum*)—allegedly to the extent that he knows Homer by heart and has also read a good deal of Menander—and prevents him from learning any Latin (cf. Marrou 1965: 385; Rochette 1997a: 329; Adams 2003: 435–436). By having him learn Greek first, Fulgentius’ mother anticipates that he will be able to pronounce Greek in an impeccable way, ‘with the aspirations preserved’ (*seruatis aspirationibus*) and ‘as if he had been raised in Greece’. It is suggested that this impeccable pronunciation is not going to be self-evident, as ‘he would have to live among Africans’ (*uicturus inter Afros*).

Fulgentius' biographer subsequently describes how well the intention of Fulgentius' mother succeeds. When he speaks Greek later in life, Fulgentius pronounces it so impeccably 'that one would think that he lived permanently among the Greeks'. The biographer specifies that this was true even after long periods without speaking or reading any Greek (*post longam desuetudinem locutionis eius et lectionis*). The statement that he was able to pronounce Greek 'with polished sounds' (*non inconditis sonis*) even after long periods of disuse highlights the efficiency of the method applied by Fulgentius' mother. The biographer further reports that only after having been trained in Greek language and literature (*litterae ... Graecae*), Fulgentius was taught Latin, first at home—'though it is usually schoolmasters (*magistri*) who teach Latin at school (*ludo*')—but later in a grammar school (*artis ... grammaticae ... auditorio*).

Whereas this description of Fulgentius' bilingual education follows Quintilian's advice to start with Greek and then to add training in Latin, Fulgentius' mother follows this sequence for a different purpose. It is not a Greek accent in Fulgentius' Latin that she wants to prevent, but an 'African' or 'African Latin' accent in his Greek. It is remarkable that again, the accomplished mastery of a language is indicated by the ability to pronounce a language as a native speaker and, more specifically, as someone who lives in the 'native region' of that language. Courcelle (2¹⁹⁴⁸: 207) strongly doubts the historical value of this passage, whereas Riché (3¹⁹⁷²: 84) does not problematize it. I am inclined to follow Courcelle's opinion, especially given the stereotypicality of this description when compared to Quintilian's advice. Regardless of the documentary value for the education of Fulgentius specifically, the passage provides valuable information on the procedures considered 'standard' or, conversely, 'exceptional' in bilingual education, most importantly because of its 'institutional' references to the schoolmaster and the classroom (cf. Kaster 1983: 327–328).

2 Biblical, Religious and Scientific Translation

An obvious context for positive appraisals of multilingual competence in early Latin Christianity is that of translation—a subject matter on which Marti (1974) remains invaluable. The quality of a translation hinges in principle on the translator's mastery of both the source and the target language. Similarly, a person different from the translator but also competent in both languages should be able to duplicate and thus to assess the translator's work. This is an ability often ascribed—whether on good grounds or not—to dedicatees in prefaces to translations. Such passages occurring in paratexts to translations will be discussed in the present section and not in Sect. 5.6 (p. 187f.). A first

instance can be found in *Ad Vigilium episcopum de Iudaica incredulitate*, a work formerly attributed to Cyprian which possibly dates to some time during the 3rd century. This work is actually the preface added by a certain Celsus to his translation of Ariston of Pella's *Disputatio Iasonis et Papisci* (CPG 1101)—‘dialogue between Iason and Papiscus’—of which neither the original nor Celsus’ translation have been preserved (Gryson in *CPL* [67]; Hübner in *PRE* 6: 1885–1886). In this work, the author praises the bilingual competence of his dedicatee, the bishop Vigilius (possibly of Thapsus, *fl. c.484*). In § 8 (CSEL 3/3: 129) he states that Vigilius is able to judge the translation at issue because of his competence in both the source and the target language (*qui utriusque linguae instructione fundatus es*). When the author uses the turn of phrase *collata utriusque operis lectione*, this hints at the bishop’s ability to actually compare the Latin translation with the Greek original.

Rufinus, too, in the prefaces to his translations often calls upon the (alleged) bilingual competence of his dedicatee in order to assess the quality of his translation. In § 7 of the preface to his translation of the pseudo-Clementine *Recognitiones*, he writes to his addressee, Gaudentius of Brescia (Bardy 1948: 172) that ‘it is certainly fair to entrust to you, who are also able to read these things in Greek (*qui haec etiam Graece legeris*), the assessment of our translation’. Likewise, in the preface to his translation of nine orations of Gregory of Nazianzus, Rufinus urges his addressee Apronianus to read his translation ‘knowing that the very bright light of his/that eloquence in Greek is obscured not a little by the exigency of translation’. He furthermore writes that Apronianus, thanks to his competence in both languages (*qui utriusque linguae habes peritiam*), will be able to judge whether this is a consequence either of the ‘poverty’ of Latin (Sect. 7.4, p. 249) or of the diluting nature of translation (Bartelink 1976a: 37). Although it is twice in the laudatory context of a preface and/or dedication that multilingual competence is valued (Sect. 5.6, p. 187f.), the suggestion made by Rufinus is that his addressees’ bilingual competence renders them capable of assessing his translations.

Jerome’s ‘Trilingualism’ and Bible Translation

Multilingual competence is at issue on various occasions and in different ways throughout the works of Jerome, the self-proclaimed *uir trilinguis*. In most cases, Jerome values his own multilingual competence in connection with his promotion of the *Hebraica ueritas* (Rebenich 1993).⁸ It should be pointed out,

⁸ On Jerome’s recourse to and promotion of the *Hebraica ueritas*, see furthermore Bammel (1988), Miletto (1993), Marksches (1994), Prinzivalli (1997), Lössl (2001b), and Weigert (2016).

incidentally, that *ueritas* is a remarkable (and apparently original) way to refer to the source language in the process of translation. It is, of course, by no means a neutral term. The rhetoric of *uir trilinguis* and *Hebraica ueritas* is a crucial part of Jerome's active construction of Christian scholarly authority (Williams 2006, Cain 2009) which will be successfully received among both contemporary and later Christian authors (Sect. 5. Interlude, p. 178f.). According to Jerome's rhetoric, his multilingual competence enables him to evaluate and to improve upon others' translations, and to render the precise sense of the original appropriately in a Latin translation.⁹ Jerome gives a highly optimistic presentation of his own multilingual competence in the preface to his translation of Tobit, when explaining how he proceeded in providing a Latin translation on the basis of the 'Chaldean' (Aramaic) text:¹⁰

since the language of the Chaldeans closely resembles the Hebrew language (Sect. 7.3, p. 240f.), I found myself a very skilful speaker of both languages (*utriusque linguae peritissimum loquacem repperiens*), availed myself of him for the work of one day, and all that he translated to me into Hebrew words (*Hebraicis uerbis expressit*), I translated into Latin phrases (*sermonibus Latinis exposui*) with the help of a scribe.

While the intermediary assisting Jerome is described as a man with a perfect bilingual competence in 'Chaldean' and Hebrew, Jerome also credits himself with an accomplished proficiency in Hebrew, which enables him to translate the Hebrew Bible verses of Tobit directly into Latin just upon hearing them, and this—as is not stated but deftly suggested—within the span of only one day.¹¹ Likewise, in *De uiris illustribus* 135, the closing paragraph devoted to his own

⁹ For studies of Jerome's translation activities and his approach in (Bible) translation, cf. Cuendet (1933), Marti (1974: *passim*), Bartelink (1978), Copeland (1989), Adler (1994), and Delisle & Woodsworth (2012: 161–163).

¹⁰ On the original language of Tobit, cf. Moore in *ABD* (6: 590–591): 'With the discovery of one Hebrew and four Aramaic copies of Tobit in Cave 4 at Qumran ..., the century-long debate as to whether Tobit was originally composed in Greek ... or a Semitic language has now been settled in favor of the latter ... But it remains an open question whether that original Semitic language would have been Hebrew ... or Aramaic ..., although support for the Aramaic has been increasing'.

¹¹ Brown (1992: 86) doubts that this passage 'can be taken at face value'. While he accredits Jerome with 'a good command of written Hebrew', he states that 'it must be doubted that Jerome was a fluent Hebrew speaker' and that 'it is more likely that his conversations with Jews were conducted in Greek, still the *lingua franca* of the Empire'; also cf. Millar (2010: 68–69).

life and works, Jerome claims to have ‘rendered the New Testament according to the faithful Greek (*Graecae fidei reddidi*)’ and to have ‘translated the Old Testament according to the Hebrew (*iuxta Hebraicum transtuli*)’,¹² while in the polemical context of *Aduersus Heluidium* 8 (PL 23: 191B) he argues that there is no need to go into the variant readings of the biblical text, ‘since the entire document of both the Old and the New Testament has now been translated into the Latin language’, thus referring to his own Bible translation. Expanding the metaphor of the ‘Hebrew source’ to both Hebrew and Greek as ‘source languages’, he specifies that ‘the water of the source should be believed to flow much purer (*multo purior ... fontis unda*) than that of the stream’.¹³ This statement may imply at the same time that Hebrew and Greek are inherently ‘less obscure’ than Latin, and that a certain ‘purity’ is necessarily lost in every process of translation.

In all of these passages, Jerome gives a very bold and self-assured presentation of his linguistic skills in connection with the practice of Bible translation. This is all the more striking when we keep in mind that Jerome actually translated only parts of both Testaments (Condamin 1920, Bogaert 1988) and probably relied extensively on Origen’s *Hexapla* in doing so (Neuschäfer 1987: 15; Bammel 1988; Dines 1998; Grafton & Williams 2006).¹⁴ If Jerome sounds exceptionally modest in the preface to his translation of Ezra, when referring to himself as ‘we, who have at least a small knowledge of the Hebrew language (*qui Hebraeae linguae saltim paruam habemus scientiam*) and who are in any case not unacquainted with the Latin language (*Latinus nobis utcumque sermo*

¹² Cf. *Ep.* 112.20.4, with regard to the Old Testament: *Ego enim non tam uetera abolere conatus sum, quae linguae meae hominibus emendata de Graeco in Latinum transtuli, quam ea testimonia, quae a Iudeis praetermissa sunt uel corrupta, proferre in medium, ut scirent nostri, quid Hebraea ueritas contineret.*

¹³ Cf. the imagery of the *fons* deployed by Jerome in *Ep.* 28.5: *Haec nos de intimo Hebraeorum fonte libauimus non opinionum riuulos persequentes neque errorum; Ep.* 34.4.1: *Restat igitur, ut rursum ad fontem sermonis recurramus Hebrei et uideamus, quomodo scriptum sit; Ep.* 106.2.3: *Sicut autem in nouo testamento, si quando apud Latinos quaestio exoritur et est inter exemplaria uarietas, recurrimus ad fontem Graeci sermonis, quo nouum scriptum est instrumentum, ita et in ueteri testamento, si quando inter Graecos Latinosque diuersitas est, ad Hebraicam configimus ueritatem, ut, quicquid de fonte proficiscitur, hoc quaeramus in riuulis.*

¹⁴ On Origen’s *Hexapla*, cf. e.g. Berschin (1980: 63): ‘Bei der Exegese des Alten Testaments mußte jede kritische Arbeit an Origenes anknüpfen; er hatte in seiner Εξαπλά, einer Ausgabe des Alten Testaments in sechs parallelen Textspalten—Urtext in hebräischer Schrift und in griechischer Umschrift, vier griechische Übersetzungen, darunter die der LXX—die Grundlagen für das Litteralverständnis des Alten Testaments geschaffen.’

non deest)', this should undoubtedly be read ironically. A more straightforward acknowledgment can be found in the preface to his translation of Job from the Hebrew (and again in the self-quotation in *Apologia aduersus libros Rufini* 2.29), where Jerome states that it was his intention to make those things clear which remained obscure in the old translation. He was able to do so, he furthermore states, because he had acquired a partial command of Hebrew (*qui et Hebraeum sermonem ex parte didicimus*) and because he had 'been versed among the grammarians, rhetoricians and philosophers almost from the cradle onwards'.

In the preface to *Commentarii in epistulas Paulinas Eph.* (PL 26: 439B), Jerome values his own multilingual competence in defending himself against critics of his translations from Greek into Latin. 'So I do not worthily translate Greek works into Latin (*Graeca in Latinum transfero*)?', he asks, and subsequently replies (cf. Bardy 1948: 228):

then either read Greek authors—if at least you have a knowledge of that language (*si eiusdem linguae habes scientiam*)—or, if you only know Latin (*si tantum Latinus es*), then please do not judge a gratuitous gift and do not, as a common proverb has it, look a gift horse in the mouth.

In other words, someone who only masters his mother tongue cannot be taken seriously in discussions over Bible translation. Jerome also values his competence in Greek in connection with translation in his *Liber tertius aduersus libros Rufini* 16. With reference to two letters of Theophilus, he states to have 'made them available to men of my native language for reading (*legendas nostrae linguae hominibus dedi*)', on behalf of the edification of the Church'. In *Commentarii in prophetas minores* Zach. 2.6.9/15 Jerome emphasizes his exclusive access to arcane *Hebraica* and his merit of transferring these to the Latin Church. At the same time, however, he makes sure to stress that the *Hebraica* he is transferring are all in accordance with the Christian Bible. This should undoubtedly be read in the light of the frequent charges that he was 'Judaizing' the Christian Bible (Newman 2001, Fonrobert 2005, Graves 2007b).¹⁵ Jerome puts it as follows:

¹⁵ Jerome's opponents were probably right in that Jerome frequently integrated Jewish (Rabbinic and Targumic) traditions into his translations of, and commentaries on, the Old Testament; cf. Condamin (1914), Kedar-Kopfstein (1994), and Hayward (1985, 1987, 1990, 2010).

I once conceived to pass on to Latin ears (*Latinis auribus prodere*) the secrets of Hebrew learning (*arcana eruditionis Hebraicae*) and the recon-dite discipline of the synagogue teachers (*magistrorum synagogae recon-ditam disciplinam*), at least insofar as it is compatible with the holy Bible.

In *Liber tertius aduersus libros Rufini* 25 Jerome emphasizes that he put his multilingual competence to use in order exactly to provide Latin Christians with a powerful weapon against the Jews. ‘Shall I not have the right’, he rhetorically asks,

to translate after the Septuagint edition which I had corrected very carefully many years ago, and made available to men of my own language (*meae linguae hominibus dedi*), for the refutation of the Jews (*ad confu-tandos Iudeos*) ... so that, if they are ever in an argument with Christians, they may not have an avenue of escape, but may be struck down in the main with their own weapon?

In *Commentarii in prophetas minores* Mal. 3.1 Jerome proclaims the absolute superiority of the Hebrew Bible text over the Septuagint, as well as the priority of meaning over a literal translation. The passage reads as follows:

It is clear from this that the apostles, the evangelists, and the Lord our Saviour himself do not follow the authority of the Seventy translators, as they have no need to, since they possess knowledge of the Hebrew language (*Hebraeae linguae habentes scientiam*), but that they translate from the Hebrew (*ex Hebreo transferre*) what they read, not caring about the syllables and points of words (*non curantes de syllabis punctisque uerborum*) as long as the truth of the sentences is transferred.

Although Jerome does not explicitly mention his own direct access to the *Hebraica ueritas*, it is obvious that he is associating himself with ‘the apostles, the evangelists, and the Lord our Saviour himself’. The implication of this passage is that Jerome is himself one of those few who master Hebrew and for whom the intermediary version of the Greek Septuagint becomes superfluous.

Whereas Jerome spends most effort on proclaiming his own multilingual competence, he also values other people’s multilingual competence within the context of (Bible) translation. In *Commentarii in Isaiam* 13.44.5/6 Jerome states that a deviant reading in Aquila’s Bible version must either be the consequence of pretended ignorance or of a misleading explanation by the Pharisees who advised Aquila, since Aquila himself was ‘a man very learned in the Hebrew lan-

guage (*homo eruditissimus linguae Hebraicae*), who translated word for word'. Aquila's advanced competence in Hebrew thus stands as a guarantee for the trustworthiness of his translation. In *De uiris illustribus* 134 Jerome mentions the translation activities of his friend and collaborator Sophronius, who lived and worked with Jerome in his monastery in Bethlehem (Bardy 1948: 141–142; Dekkers 1953: 204–205; Rochette 1997a: 252). Jerome portrays Sophronius as 'a very learned man', who wrote several works and in addition translated two of Jerome's works (viz. *Ep. 22* and *Vita sancti Hilarionis*) from Latin into Greek 'in a most elegant way' (*elegantissime*). The latter evaluation is important, for it shows that Jerome deems Sophronius capable of preserving the elegance which is in his opinion characteristic of Latin (Banniard 1988) when translating from Latin into Greek. Even more remarkably, Sophronius is accredited with having provided Greek versions of the psalms and the prophets, on the basis of Jerome's translations of these Old Testament books from Hebrew into Latin.

Relatedly, Jerome also frequently criticizes other people's lack of multilingual competence, affecting as it does the quality of their translations. In the preface to his translation of the book of Ezra (repeated in *Apologia aduersus libros Rufini* 2.28), he writes that

those who possess copies [of the Greek text] and have no knowledge of the Hebrew language (*Hebrei sermonis ignari sunt*) will make more mistakes since they do not know which one of the many versions is the more accurate one.

This passage implies that a lack of multilingual competence is a potentially dangerous circumstance in the context of Bible translation. In the preface to his translation of Daniel, Jerome criticizes an extant translation of the Old Testament book, which in his opinion 'strongly deviates from the truth and is to be repudiated by right judgment'. One of the possible reasons for this, he argues, is that the translation was falsely edited under the name of the Seventy translators, by someone who 'was not well enough acquainted with the Chaldean [Aramaic] language' (*non satis Chaldeam linguam sciente*), in which part of the book of Daniel was originally written. In Section 5.3 (below, p. 172f.), extensive attention will be paid to (lack of) multilingual competence as an argument used both by Jerome and by Rufinus during the Origenist controversy.

Ausonius on His Own Bilingualism, Auxentius on Ulfila's Trilingualism

Ausonius hints at, or perhaps rather claims, his own bilingual competence in Latin and Greek in his *Epitaphia heroum qui bello Troico interfuerunt* (cf. Marrou 1965: 384). In the introduction to this collection of 'Latinized' epitaphs for the heroes of the Trojan war, Ausonius writes that 'when I had retrieved these things of old in [the work of] a certain philologist, I turned them into Latin (*Latino sermone conuerti*)', and further specifies that he did so 'not in order that they would follow throughout the right order, but that they would cohere freely and would not deviate'. This statement of translation policy suggests that Ausonius understood the Greek original perfectly well, but (for an unspecified reason) preferred a free translation above a literal one. Although Ausonius certainly had some knowledge of Greek (Irmscher 1993: 180), it is very possible that he did not master Greek that well and is here only claiming a bilingual competence in Latin and Greek as a symbol of cultural prestige (Bardy 1948: 181–183).¹⁶

Auxentius of Durostorum was an Arian bishop and a pupil of Ulfila, and should not be confused with Ambrose's Arian predecessor in Milan (Lafferty 2003: 54). His *De uita et obitu Vlfilae*—a vita taking the form of a letter and dat-ing to shortly after Ulfila's death in 383—is our main source for the life and works of the Arian bishop.¹⁷ Ulfila's multilingual competence is an important

16 Ausonius also emphasizes the Greek competence of his deceased father in his *Epicedion in patrem* (cf. Adams 2003: 356). Assuming his father's voice, Ausonius has him say: 'I was never fluent in Latin speech (*sermone impromptus Latio*), but the Greek language sufficed for me (*uerum Attica lingua sufficit*) with her words of cultivated eloquence (*culti uocibus eloquii*)'. While at first glance, this statement may seem to suggest Ausonius' father's modesty, it does indicate that his father, who was of Greek descent, was competent in both Greek and Latin. By stressing that he was more competent in Greek—a high-prestige language—than in Latin, Ausonius might suggest that his father's bilingualism, biased towards Greek, is socioculturally preferable to a bilingual competence in native speakers of Latin.

17 Cf. Kany (2002), Dümler (2002a), and Burton (2002: 393). On Ulfila, cf. furthermore Sivan (1995) and O'Donnell (1979: 3): 'The bulk of the eastern tribes (including Vandals and Goths) had been evangelized in the fourth century by a mission beginning with the Arian bishop Ulfila, whose translation of scripture into Gothic is the earliest monument of that language'. Also cf. Lafferty (2003: 54): 'Ulfila also created a Gothic script and translated the Bible from Greek into Gothic, adding his own exegesis in Gothic, as well as in Greek and Latin. Not only did the Goths use Gothic scriptures, but they also conducted scriptural exegesis and scholarship in that language ... The Gothic Christians, then, used their native language as the language of their new religion from the beginning'. On early Visigothic Christianity generally, cf. Thompson (1966: 94–132).

feature in the eulogizing account of his life (cf. below, p. 185). Auxentius states that ‘in these three languages’ (*ipsis tribus linguis*)—namely in Latin, Greek and Gothic—Ulfilas left behind various useful and edifying treatises and translations (sc 267: 244; cf. Bardy 1948: 194). Undoubtedly, Ulfilas’ most important realization in this domain was his translation of the Bible from Greek into Gothic (Lafferty 2003: 33–34).

Boethius' Bilingualism and Scientific Translation

Boethius repeatedly evaluates multilingual competence in a positive way in the context of the translation of Greek scientific writings into Latin or, more broadly, the transference of Greek learning into a Latin context, of which he had made his personal project.¹⁸ In the preface to his *De institutione arithmeticā* (CCSL 94A: 3), addressed to his father-in-law Symmachus, Boethius claims to have ‘brought over to the treasury of the Roman language those things taken from the richness of Greek writings’. It is important to note that both Boethius and Symmachus are designated by Courcelle (2¹⁹⁴⁸: 258; tr. mine) as representatives of a ‘triumphant hellenism’ in Ostrogothic Italy. Although *De institutione arithmeticā* draws from Greek examples without being an actual translation (Glei 2002: 127), Boethius suggests in this preface that his command of Greek allows for the appropriation of characteristically Greek types of knowledge to a Roman context (Courcelle 2¹⁹⁴⁸: 260). In the same preface, Boethius appeals to Symmachus’ advanced bilingual competence (*utrarumque peritis-simus litterarum*), presenting it as the precondition for his addressee to assess the quality of his work. Thanks to his bilingual competence, Symmachus is able to ‘prescribe with just one statement to those not sharing in the Greek language (*Graiae orationis expertibus*)’ how they should evaluate Boethius’ professedly innovative project of writing Latin introductions to ‘typically Greek’ scientific subjects. Courcelle (2¹⁹⁴⁸: 260, cf. 305) states that ‘une telle œuvre choquera ceux qui ne possèdent pas les deux langues, mais Boèce encore jeune compte sur le prestige de Symmaque pour faire taire ses critiques’, and it is probably right to say that the perfectly bilingual Symmachus is here invoked as a topical *argumentum ab auctoritate* in support of the as yet unauthoritative Boethius’ ambitious initiative.

¹⁸ On Boethius’ scholarly program and his project of scientific translation, cf. Kirkby (1981), Reiss (1982), Ebbesen (2009), and Marenbon (2003: 17–18). On his bilingual competence and his translation activities generally, cf. Courcelle (2¹⁹⁴⁸: 258–261, 305). On Boethius as a translator, cf. Adamo (1967); on his (rather literal) technique of translation, cf. Marenbon (2003: 18).

Cassiodorus on Translation Activities at Vivarium

Cassiodorus himself repeatedly values multilingual competence in the context of translation. This subsection will deal with his appraisals of the multilingual competence and the translation activities of Boethius, Dionysius Exiguus, and the translators active at Vivarium.

Greek learning is an important theme throughout the letters included in the *Variae* (Arnold 2008: 125; cf. also Arnold 2014). An interesting case can be found at 1.45.3–4, part of a literary letter allegedly addressed by king Theoderic to Boethius (Barnish 1992: 20). In this letter, Cassiodorus—who succeeded Boethius as Theoderic's *magister officiorum*—extensively praises Boethius' ambitious project of scientific translation (cf. above, p. 166). This ‘virtual encomium of the Greek learning of Boethius’ (Arnold 2008: 125 n. 127) leaves it unstated but clearly implies that Boethius had a profound mastery of both Latin and Greek.¹⁹ Boethius' actual translations are explicitly referred to only once, namely when the author states that natives of Latin have access to Greek science ‘through your translations’ (*translationibus ... tuis*). Apart from this statement, Boethius' efforts are praised in the broader context of the transference of Greek culture and learning to a ‘Roman’ environment. The author refers to commonplace Roman and Greek types of clothing in order to emphasize the fundamental cultural ‘otherness’ and, thus, the exceptional merit of Boethius' initiatives (Courcelle 1948: 332 n. 5). The author states that through Boethius alone (*te uno auctore*) Rome has received all of Greek science and culture ‘in her native speech’ (*patrio sermone*), and he even contends that someone able to read both the Greek original and Boethius' Latin translation, would prefer Boethius' version over the original. This is a remarkable line of rhetoric, reminiscent of Cicero's project to replace Greek libraries with Latin ones (*Tusculanae disputationes* 2.2.6; cf. e.g. McElduff 2013: 103–104).

Bilingual competence in Latin and Greek, closely related to the translation of religious and scientific works, is an important theme in Cassiodorus' applauding comments on his friend Dionysius Exiguus in *Institutiones* 1.23.2 (cf. Borst 1958: 430; O'Donnell 1979: 24, 211).²⁰ Cassiodorus writes that Dionysius was

¹⁹ Cf. the *Anecdoton Holderi: Excerpta ex Cassiodori libello quod nuncupatur ‘Ordo generis Cassiodororum’*, v: *Boethius dignitatibus summis excelluit, utraque lingua peritissimus orator fuit*. This fragment is discussed by O'Donnell (1979: 13–14) as one of the chief sources for our knowledge of the life of Cassiodorus. Also cf. ‘Appendix i: The *Ordo generis Cassiodororum*’ in O'Donnell (1979: 259–266 [260]).

²⁰ Dionysius, a friend and possibly the former teacher of Cassiodorus (O'Donnell 1979: 211), was born in Scythia Minor around 470 and moved to Rome after the death of bishop Gelasius I in 496. As a consequence of this migration, Dionysius perfectly mastered both

'Scythian by birth (*Scytha natione*) but thoroughly Roman in his manner of life (*moribus omnino Romanus*)', and that he was 'most highly learned in both languages' (*in utraque lingua ualde doctissimus*). Dionysius is reported to have translated 'in an excellent way' the collections of ecclesiastical *Canones* from Greek into Latin, along with many other works. Cassiodorus emphasizes that these translations are suitable for ecclesiastical use (*quae utilitati possunt ecclesiasticae conuenire*). In Cassiodorus' presentation, Dionysius was able to translate Greek texts into Latin while just reading them, as well as the other way round. In both directions, he managed to do so without preparation, quickly and without any mistakes.

With regard to the translation activities carried out in the circle around Cassiodorus in Vivarium, O'Donnell (1979: 143) states that

in spite of the extensive program of translations from the Greek that [Cassiodorus] instituted at the Vivarium, there is no evidence that he ever worked as a translator himself. Quite to the contrary, we are repeatedly told the names of the actual translators who did the work.

The three names of translators we know are Bellator, Mutianus, and Epiphanius (O'Donnell 1979: 215). It would be highly interesting to find out whether the translators mentioned by Cassiodorus actually collaborated as a team—as is possibly suggested in *Inst. 1.9.1*, where he writes that 'my friends ... have translated' commentaries by John Chrysostom—and if so, exactly in which way they proceeded. Did they, for instance, divide a work into several portions and subsequently revise each other's portions in order to provide a homogeneous entity? Unfortunately, it has become impossible to reconstruct these translators' methods. Throughout the *Institutiones*, Cassiodorus often considers it important to

Greek and Latin, a bilingual competence which he put to use in translating Greek writings into Latin, and in mediating between the Eastern and Western Churches (Weigand 2002: 206). Dionysius 'capitalizes' his own bilingual competence in §1 of the preface to his translation of a report on the discovery of the head of John the Baptist by an Eastern abbot named Marcellus (CCSL 85: 69). It is in the context of translating this ecclesiastical, edifying work that Dionysius values his command of Greek and Latin. He takes care not to present his bilingual competence as vain learning, or his translation from Greek into Latin as mere intellectual pastime. He topically stresses that he saw himself 'compelled' to do so by the 'solicitude and eagerness' of his brothers. According to his account, it is convenient to read this story relating to John the Baptist to the faithful crowd on the Saint's feast, and it is only possible to do so if the story has first been translated from Greek into Latin. Thus, Dionysius ascribes to his brothers the crucial motivation for translating this work, a motivation which is pragmatic-ecclesiastical in nature.

mention by whom a translation from Greek into Latin has been made—either in the past or on his own instigation.²¹ He also repeatedly states his appraisal of a translator and his work.²² This implies that the practice of translating theological or religious writings made bilingual competence in Latin and Greek highly relevant to Cassiodorus.

3 Theology and Biblical Exegesis

Given the complicated and intrinsically multilingual nature of the transmission of the biblical text(s), it comes as no surprise that not only translation strictly speaking but also biblical interpretation provides an important context for positive appraisals of multilingual competence. Early Christian Latin authors frequently hark back to an (allegedly) more correct or original reading in the Hebrew or Greek Bible text in order to improve on others' exegesis, or they explicitly invoke their own or others' multilingual competence in order to claim exegetic authority. In the period preceding Jerome, Hilary of Poitiers in *Tractatus super Psalmos* 138.43 relies on the authority of 'those who have attained knowledge of the Hebrew language' (*hi qui Hebreai sermonis scientiam consecuti sunt*) in order to adjust a particular point of exegesis. This recourse to 'those in the know' implies a positive appraisal of multilingual competence within the context of biblical exegesis. A similar implication emerges from *Tractatus super Psalmos* 142.1, where Hilary calls upon 'those who are skilled in both languages (*qui utraque lingua eruditi sunt*)', namely in Latin and Hebrew, in order to propose a better reading in the Latin Bible text.

21 Cf. e.g. *Inst.* 1.9.5: *Sed quoniam diximus expositores, quantos uel inuenire priscos potuimus, uel nuper per amicos nostros de Graeca lingua transferri uel noua cudi fecimus.*

22 Namely *Inst.* 1.1.1: Eustathius' translation of Basil of Caesarea's *Homiliae in Hexaemeron*; 1.1.8: Jerome's translation of Origen's sermons on the Octateuch; 1.5.2: Epiphanius' translation of Didymus of Alexandria's commentary on Proverbs; 1.5.4: Epiphanius' translation of a commentary on Song of Songs by Epiphanius of Salamis; 1.6.1: Jerome's translation of Job; 1.8.3: Mutianus' translation of John Chrysostom's sermons on the Epistle to the Hebrews; 1.8.12: Rufinus' condensed translation of Origen's commentary on Paul's Epistle to the Romans; 1.9.1: the translation by his friends (presumably Bellator, Mutianus and Epiphanius) of John Chrysostom's commentaries on the Acts of the Apostles; 1.11.2: Epiphanius' translation of the *Codex encyclius*.

Jerome's Trilingualism and Biblical Exegesis

The most rewarding source for positive appraisals in this context are, understandably, the writings of Jerome. Throughout his exegetical works, Jerome puts his multilingual competence—most importantly in Greek and Hebrew—to use in order to corroborate particular readings or interpretations. Interestingly, Jerome himself explicitly posits the importance of multilingual competence in biblical exegesis as a general principle in *Ep. 106.2.3* (cf. Berschin 1980: 32, 65), deploying his frequent imagery of the Hebrew or Greek ‘source’ when stating that

for the New Testament, if at any time a question arises among the Latins and there is contradiction between the versions, we have recourse to the source of the Greek language (*recurrimus ad fontem Graeci sermonis*), in which the New Testament is written; likewise for the Old Testament, if at any time there is a contradiction between the Greek and Latin versions, we have recourse to the Hebrew truth (*ad Hebraicam configimus ueritatem*) in order that whatever departs from the source (*quicquid de fonte profiscitur*) we may find it in the rivulets (*hoc quaeramus in riuulis*).

On various occasions throughout his exegetical works, Jerome applies this general principle to specific problems of exegesis. In this way, he actively presents his command of Hebrew as the exclusive key to the ‘hidden truth’ of the biblical text and, thus, as a precondition for a sound exegesis of the Old Testament. Jerome repeatedly presents those who do not master Hebrew as people ‘in need of exegetic help’, and in turn profiles himself as the one who is able to provide this help, thanks to his command of Hebrew. On various occasions, he opposes the limited group of people who know (some) Hebrew and thus have a serious advantage in doing biblical exegesis to the large group of people who do not know any Hebrew.²³

²³ The following are some representative quotations: *Commentarius in Ecclesiasten 8.6/7: qui eiusdem linguae habuerit notitiam*; *Commentarii in Isaiam 6.14.2/4: quidam Hebraei sermonis ignarus*; *Commentarii in Ezechielem 2.5.1/3: propter Graecos et Latinos qui Hebraeae linguae non habent scientiam*; *Commentarii in Ezechielem 12.40.44/49: scientibus Hebraeam linguam vs. Hebraei sermonis expertibus*; *Tractatus in Psalmos 146.1: hii [sic] qui Hebraeam ignorant linguam*; *Tractatus in Psalmos* (second series) 15.10 (CCSL 78: 384): *qui Hebraeae linguae saltim paruam notitiam habuerit*; *Commentarioli in Psalmos 7* (CCSL 72: 188): *ii qui Hebraei sermonis scientiam non habent*; *Commentarioli in Psalmos 59: qui Hebraei sermonis non habent notitiam*; *In Hieremiam prophetam libri sex 5.27.2: qui Hebraeae linguae saltim paruam habuerit scientiam*.

Interestingly, Jerome seems to cover himself against charges of taking excessive pride in his multilingual competence. In *Commentarii in prophetas minores* Os. 3.10.13 he denies to take pleasure in showing off his knowledge of *Iudaica* and *Hebraica*, acknowledging to be ‘forced, against my will, to discuss the peculiarities of the Hebrew language (*Hebraeae linguae proprietatibus*) all too often’. When Jerome states to be ‘forced’, this should be read as a rhetorical pose and, more specifically, as a defense against the charge of being a ‘Judaizer’ (cf. above, p. 162). Somewhat further, he presents his explanations as a service to the Latin Church, when writing: ‘But I strive to explain those things which remain unintelligible, certainly to people of another language (*alienae linguae hominibus*)’, by which he means people who do not know Hebrew. Furthermore, in *Commentarii in prophetas minores* Zach. 1.1.8/13, Jerome explicitly refers to the Jewish ‘informants’ on whom he relied for matters relating to Hebrew language and culture, thus reminding his readers of his privileged access to arcane Jewish knowledge, by way of his command of Hebrew. ‘All this is literal’, he writes, ‘in order that I would not seem to hide for our people (*celare nos*) what I have learned from my teachers of that foreign language (*peregrinae linguae magistris*)’. It seems justified to apply to this specific statement Graves’ general comment (2007a: 13) that ‘Jerome took considerable pride in the fact that he was not self-taught’. Indeed, the repeated references to his teachers of the (Greek and) Hebrew language (cf. Bardy 1934) can be interpreted as one among many techniques applied by Jerome to corroborate his own intellectual authority. From a present-day point of view, it is somewhat surprising that Jerome does not rather try to fashion himself a self-taught man. The strategy followed by Jerome can presumably be explained by the fact that his teachers not only made him familiar with the Hebrew language, but also with otherwise hardly accessible Jewish exegetical traditions.

In two revealing passages, Jerome positions himself *vis-à-vis* two authoritative earlier exegetes with varying linguistic competences, namely Origen and Hilary of Poitiers. The first case in point is Jerome’s entry on Origen in *De uiris illustribus* 54—a work dating back to before the Origenist controversy, which compelled Jerome to distance himself from Origen. Jerome writes that Origen

was so assiduous in the study of the holy Bible that he even learned the Hebrew language (*ut etiam Hebraeam linguam ... edisceret*), contrary to the spirit of his time and of his people (*contra aetatis gentisque suae naturam*).

In accordance with the general thread of Vessey (2005), one can easily transfer this sentence to the scholarly profile Jerome in his own days constructed for

himself. As such, the sentence emphasizes the singularity of Jerome's project of Bible translation and exegesis. In accordance to his own practice, Jerome takes care to present Origen's Hebrew competence as a crucial part of his biblical studies. Thus, he stresses the exegetic relevance of Origen's and his own otherwise potentially superfluous or even dangerous Hebrew learning. In the second relevant passage, *Ep. 34.3–4*, Jerome deals with an erroneous interpretation of Ps. 126:4 proposed by Hilary of Poitiers in *Tractatus super Psalmos 126.19*. Jerome—who had a high esteem for Hilary (Doignon 1971: 49–55; *De uiris illustribus* 100)—states that this erroneous interpretation

cannot be ascribed to [Hilary's] fault, since he was unacquainted with the Hebrew language (*qui Hebraei sermonis ignarus fuit*) and since he also had only a whiff of literacy in Greek (*Graecarum quoque litterarum quandam aurulam ceperat*).

As a consequence, Jerome states, Hilary was bound to rely on a priest named Heliodorus (Marti 1974: 167), who was, however, not able to find out Origen's comment *ad locum* and 'would rather insinuate his own opinion than confess his ignorance'. Hilary accepted this (devised) explanation, 'and so', Jerome concludes, 'it remains for us to go back again to the source of Hebrew speech (*ut rursum ad fontem sermonis recurramus Hebraei*) and to see how it stands there'.²⁴ It is clear from this passage that for Jerome, multilingual competence forms a serious advantage in doing biblical exegesis, while at the same time, the lack of multilingual competence excuses the error made by Hilary, who in Jerome's opinion was otherwise an excellent exegete.²⁵

Multilingual Competence as an Argument in the Quarrel between Jerome and Rufinus

Multilingual competence and the lack of it are important arguments in the specific context of Jerome's quarrel with Rufinus during the Origenist controversy

²⁴ For an extensive discussion of this letter, cf. Adkin (2004).

²⁵ Jerome's appraisal of Hilary's Greek competence is more positive in *Ep. 57.6.3*: *Sufficit in praesenti nominasse Hilarium confessorem, qui homilias in Job et in psalmos tractatus plurimos in Latinum uertit e Graeco nec adsedit litterae dormitanti et putida rusticorum interpretatione se torsit, sed quasi captiuos sensus in suam linguam uictoris iure transposit.* Jerome refers to Hilary's *Tractatus super Psalmos*, the precise status of which with regard to Origen (translation vs. adaptation) is a matter of debate (Marti 1974: 182, 191). On Jerome's varying appraisal of Hilary, cf. Bardy (1948: 213). On Jerome's *Ep. 57* in general, cf. Bartelink (1976b, 1980) and Lafferty (2003: 25–26).

(Kelly 1975: 250; cf. Introduction, p. 15). This famous controversy had been initiated by Epiphanius (310/320–410), the bishop of Salamis on Cyprus, who in 393 listed Origen's teachings as 'heretical' in his *Panarion*. Jerome had met Epiphanius when he visited the East for the first time, and in 382 had travelled to Rome with him (Rebenich 2002: 43).²⁶ Within the framework of the Origenist controversy, Rufinus globally speaking defended Origen and his teachings, whereas Jerome felt compelled to adhere to Epiphanius and his viewpoints. For Jerome, this was a very uncomfortable position, due to his earlier applauding comments on Origen; consequently, it also made him liable himself to accusations of heresy (cf. Jeanjean 1999: 51–55).

In the course of the controversy, multilingual competence or lack of it were frequently and efficiently championed or criticized by both parties involved. More specifically, Rufinus tries to wipe the floor with Jerome's widely proclaimed multilingual competence. In *Apologia contra Hieronymum* 2.9 (401) he argues that before Jerome became a monk, he 'knew the Greek literature and language just as little as I did' (*mecum pariter et litteras Graecas et linguam penitus ignorabat*). At 2.35 Rufinus furthermore develops the argument that 'a speaker of Latin who is saintly and wise does not necessarily also have a sufficient knowledge of the Greek language', and that the other way round, 'someone's sanctity is not detracted from just because he lacks the knowledge of a foreign language (*cui deest peregrinae linguae notitia*)'. In other words, Rufinus wants his readership to believe, the multilingual competence which Jerome likes to boast of does not necessarily guarantee his religious superiority or good intentions.²⁷

²⁶ On the person and the multilingual competence of Epiphanius, cf. furthermore Dekkers (1953: 227), Dummer (2006b [1968]), Rebenich (1993: 71), Rochette (1997a: 252), and Dencker *et al.* (2012: 433).

²⁷ Overall, a couple of passages show that authors could still be praised for their multilingual competences in spite of their lacking orthodoxy. Gennadius in *De uiris illustribus* 46 briefly mentions the bilingual competence of the Pelagian bishop Julian of Eclanum (Lamberigts 1999, Lössl 2001a), whom he describes as 'a man of sagacious mind, versed in the holy Bible, and a scholar in the Greek and Latin language (*Graeca et Latina lingua scholasticus*)'. Vincentius of Lérins in *Commonitorium* 11.7 thematizes the bilingual competence of Photinus of Sirmium (d. 376), who had repeatedly been condemned for his theology (Barth 2002: 721). Vincentius discusses Photinus' global verbal capacities and specifies that he was able both to speak and to write in both Greek and Latin (*utroque sermone ... disputaret et scriberet*), and that he even left monumental works in both languages (Bardy 1948: 133; Dekkers 1953: 228). Interestingly, Vincentius observes that this bilingual competence added to Photinus' danger as a heretic, as it increased his impact.

A skilled polemicist, Jerome did of course not fail to ‘retort’ Rufinus’ arguments centering on multilingual competences. In his *Apologia aduersus libros Rufini* of 401/402 Jerome at 1.13 addresses Rufinus by venomously remarking that ‘I did not have to learn Hebrew from you’, while at 1.19 he refers to Rufinus when stating that

we must indeed excuse someone for being ignorant of the truth of the Hebrew language (*si ignoret linguae Hebraicae ueritatem*) if he even makes occasional slips in Latin (*qui interdum et in Latinis haesitat*).

In this connection, it is worth pointing out that Jerome criticizes Rufinus’ (allegedly) flawed Latinity throughout the *Apologia* and especially at 1.17. At 2.22 Jerome turns to his extensive defense of Epiphanius’ multilingual competences—in *Liber tertius aduersus libros Rufini* 6 he calls him πεντάγλωσσος, ‘quintilingual’—in Greek, Syriac, Hebrew, ‘Egyptian’ (Coptic),²⁸ and Latin. In *De adulteratione librorum Origenis* 15, written in 397, Rufinus had ironically stated that Epiphanius of Salamis ‘feels compelled, as if it were by the necessity of evangelization, to speak ill of Origen to all the nations and in all languages (*per omnes linguas*)’. Rufinus’ statement was presented (improperly) by Jerome as a criticism of Epiphanius’ multilingual competence. With reference to the events described in Acts, Jerome rhetorically asks (at 2.22) whether ‘both the apostles and the apostolic men, who spoke in various languages, are therefore guilty’, and subsequently addresses Rufinus with a knock-down argument *ad hominem*: ‘will you, who are a bilingual yourself, ridicule me, a trilingual (*me trilinguem bilinguis ipse ridebis*)?’²⁹ Again in *Liber tertius aduersus libros Rufini*

²⁸ Cf. the brief discussion in Denecker *et al.* (2012: 433–434). For an investigation of early Christian authors’ comments on Coptic, cf. Dummer (2006c [1968]). On the question of Epiphanius’ actual multilingual competences, cf. Dummer (2006b [1968]: 33).

²⁹ Jerome is the only early Christian Latin author to use the adjectives *bilinguis* and *trilinguis*. Undoubtedly, his use of these terms in an actually ‘linguistic’ sense—that is to say, not with reference to the number of tongues of mythical creatures—goes back to Varro. This can be inferred from Jerome’s statement in the preface to *Commentarii in epistulas Paulinas* Gal. 2 (CCSL 77A: 79) (cf. Isidore, *Etym.* 15.1.63) that *Massiliam Phocaei condiderunt: quos ait Varro trilingues esse, quod et Graece loquantur, et Latine, et Gallice*. The Varronian source text is lost, but as Collart (1978b: 6) points out, Jerome in his (incomplete) inventory of Varro’s works (*Ep.* 33.2) signals five treatises with a ‘linguistic’ character, namely *De lingua Latina*, *De sermone Latino ad Marcellum*, *De origine linguae Latinae*, *De similitudine uerborum*, and *Epitome de lingua Latina*.

6 Jerome describes himself as ‘a philosopher, a rhetorician, a grammarian, a logician, a Hebrew, a Greek, a Latin, a trilingual (*trilinguis*)’, and ironically writes to Rufinus that

you in like manner will also be a bilingual (*bilinguis*), as your knowledge of the Greek and Latin languages is such that the Greeks take you for a Latin, and the Latins take you for a Greek (*ut et Graeci te Latinum, et Latini Graecum putent*).

Elaborating upon the common assumption that an accomplished mastery of a particular language demonstrates itself when it is produced (in spoken, or here rather in written form) as it would be produced by a ‘native’, Jerome argues in other words that Rufinus both when writing Greek and when writing Latin fails to avoid elements sneaking in from the other language.

Augustine on the Necessity of Multilingual Competence in Biblical Exegesis

Augustine in his *De doctrina Christiana*—which was among other things intended as an introduction to biblical interpretation and in which language-related issues play a role of primary importance—values multilingual competence in a highly positive way insofar as it can be helpful in biblical exegesis (Marrou 1958: 403–404; Fontaine 1959: 32; Irvine 1994: 182). Stating at 3.1.1 that a biblical exegete should, among several other things, be ‘equipped with a knowledge of languages’ (*praemunitus ... scientia linguarum*), he argues at 2.10.15–11.16 (cf. 3.29.40) that the command of languages (*linguarum cognitio*) is an ‘important aid’ (*magnum remedium*) against unknown literal signs, which mostly amount to unknown words in foreign languages.³⁰ A little further on—in phrasings that will be integrated by Isidore—Augustine specifies that

30 Augustine explains the difference between literal signs (*signa propria*) and metaphorical signs (*signa translata*) as follows (*De doctrina Christiana* 2.10.15): ‘Signs are either literal or metaphorical. They are called literal when used to signify the things for which they were invented: so, for example, when we say *bouem*, meaning the animal which we and all speakers of Latin call by that name. They are metaphorical when the actual things which we signify by the particular words are used to signify something else: when, for example, we say *bouem* and not only interpret these two syllables to mean the animal normally referred to by that name but also understand, by that animal, ‘worker in the gospel’, which is what the Bible, as interpreted by the apostle Paul, means when it says, ‘You shall not muzzle the ox that treads out the grain’. On Augustine’s distinction between literal and metaphorical signs, cf. e.g. Schirner (2015: 23–26).

men whose mother tongue is Latin (*Latinae ... linguae homines*) ... need two other languages in order to understand the holy Bible, namely Hebrew and Greek (*Hebraea scilicet et Graeca*).

Jerome evidently served as the model for the benefit of multilingual competence in the context of biblical exegesis (cf. more extensively in the Interlude, p. 178f.). Augustine describes the purpose of this trilingual competence in very pragmatic terms: 'so that recourse may be had to the preceding copies, if the infinite variety of Latin interpreters (*Latinorum interpretum infinita uarietas*) gives rise to any hesitation'. He also notes that a multilingual competence may be helpful in understanding foreign words which stand untranslated in the Latin Bible text, 'for there are certain words in certain languages, which cannot pass by way of translation into the usage of another language' (Sect. 9.3, p. 332f.). However, in Augustine's opinion these untranslatabilities are only a minor motivation for learning the biblical languages, secondary to the confusing discrepancy among the Bible versions of his days (i.e. what we know as the *Veteres Latinae*):

But it is not because of these few words, which it is very easy to write down or to ask someone, but rather because of the discrepancies among the interpreters, that a command of these languages is necessary (*illarum linguarum est cognitio necessaria*) ... For whoever in the first times of faith was able to lay hands on a Greek volume and at the same time thought to possess some competence in both languages (*aliquantum facultatis sibi utriusque linguae habere uidebatur*), attempted to translate it.

This uncontrolled and complicated process of Bible translation in 'the early days of faith' is presented by Augustine as the cause for the large number of discrepancies existing among the *Veteres Latinae*. The unsound character of these translations is directly connected to the translators' insufficient bilingual competence (cf. *aliquantum facultatis*) in Greek and Latin. In order to counter the diversity of the *Veteres Latinae*, Augustine argues, the aspiring biblical exegete simply needs a command of Greek and Hebrew, implicitly but obviously in imitation of Jerome's trilingual competence. At 2.13.19 Augustine repeats that in order to counter this issue (cf. Schirner 2015: 32),

one either has to acquire competence in those languages (*linguarum illarum ... petenda cognitio*) from which the Bible has come forth into Latin, or one needs to procure oneself of the [authoritative] translations of those who have most strictly followed the original words.

Again at 2.14.21, Augustine insists that ‘one should study these very languages’ (*linguae eadem ... ediscendae*), at least ‘if one has the time (*otium*) and the intelligence (*ingenium*)’ (cf. Marrou 4¹⁹⁵⁸: 440; Schirner 2015: 36–37). Multilingual competence is thus presented as a valuable asset in biblical exegesis, but the acquisition of it is less than evident (cf. above, p. 155). Augustine repeatedly applies this general principle to specific textual problems involving literal signs, stating that ambiguities in the Latin Bible text—such as *ōs* / *ōs* ('mouth' / 'bone') and *praedīco* / *praedīco* ('to proclaim' / 'to predict')—can conclusively be cleared up by having recourse to the source language (cf. Schirner 2015: 122–124).³¹

However, as was pointed out in the Introduction (p. 14), Augustine himself actually did not master any Hebrew and only some Greek,³² and this did certainly not set him alone among his contemporaries. It is worth pointing out, incidentally, that Isidore of Seville, who integrated Augustine's advices nearly literally, himself only knew Latin (cf. Merrills 2013: 310). In order to make up for this deficiency, Augustine on several occasions invokes the multilingual competence of an undefined group of ‘others’, possibly Jewish ‘informants’, in order to corroborate his exegesis. In *Ep.* 101.4 he acknowledges not to know Hebrew himself and to rely upon ‘those who are excellently skilled in that language’ (*qui eam linguam probe callent*), while in *Ep.* 55.1.2 he invokes the opinion of people who know both Greek and Hebrew (*qui linguam utramque nouerunt*) and in *De ciuitate Dei* 15.17 of those exegetes mastering Hebrew (*periti linguae illius*).³³

Apart from these possible anonymous linguistic ‘informants’, Augustine and other linguistically less gifted exegetes could readily rely on explanatory lists of Hebrew proper names as useful reference tools in biblical exegesis (Marrou 4¹⁹⁵⁸: 411; Altaner 1967b [1953]; Dulaey 2002: 293). This was so important because many toponyms and personal names were believed to possess a hid-

³¹ Cf. e.g. at 3.3.7 (cf. 4.10.24): *talia linguae praecedentis inspectione diiudicantur; ad codicem praecedentis linguae recurrentum*; and at 3.4.8: *praecedentis linguae soluat inspectio*.

³² Cf. Augustine's own testimonies in *Ep.* 101.4: ... *Hebraea lingua, quam ignoro*, and in *Contra litteras Petiliani* 2.38.9r: *Et ego quidem Graecae linguae perparum assecutus sum et prope nihil*. However, Marrou (4¹⁹⁵⁸: 29) emphasizes that due to the strongly rhetorical context, the latter statement cannot be taken at face value.

³³ Throughout Augustine's exegetical works, the small group of people with a command of Greek and/or Hebrew is often (passingly) relied upon as an authority argument. Some further *loci* are the following: *Enarrationes in Psalmos* 72.4, 83.2, 98.3, 131.11, 132.11, 136.18, 140.25, *Quaestiones in Heptateuchum* 1.97, 5.3, 7.41-3, *In Iohannis euangelium tractatus* 51.2, *Contra Cresconium* 1.14.17.

den meaning and were thus reckoned by Augustine not among literal signs but among *signa translata*, improper or metaphorical signs (cf. above, p. 175), in biblical exegesis. When applaudingly referring to such lexica—see *De doctrina Christiana* 2.16.23, 2.39.59; *Enarrationes in Psalmos* 33.1.4—Augustine presumably thinks first and foremost of the lexica of biblical *realia* which had been translated and adapted by Jerome from Greek into Latin (cf. Amsler 1989: 109–111). More specifically, Jerome during the period 389–391 had composed his *Liber interpretationis Hebraicorum nominum* on the basis of a lexicon allegedly published by Philo of Alexandria and adapted by Origen (Courcelle 1948: 71, 98 n. 6; Opelt 1965: 827), his *De situ et nominibus locorum Hebraicorum* on the basis of Eusebius of Caesarea's *Onomasticon* (Courcelle 1948: 103; Taylor, Freeman-Grenville & Chapman 2003), and his *Quaestiones Hebraicae in Genesim* on the basis of various Greek and Rabbinic sources (Kamesar 1990; Hayward 1990, 1995). It is implied in Augustine's approving comments that the compilers of these biblical lexica, and Jerome in particular, have put their multilingual competence to common use in the context of biblical exegesis, namely by providing bypasses for linguistically less gifted exegetes.

Interlude: The Impact of Jerome's Rhetoric of *uir trilinguis* and *Hebraica ueritas*

It has been pointed out above that Jerome's rhetoric of *uir trilinguis* and *Hebraica ueritas* resonated well among contemporary and later Christian writers. The present section will take a closer look at this process of 'entrenchment' as a part of the broader historical reception of Jerome (cf. Laistner 1952, Mathisen 2009). While Graves (2007a: 2) simply states that 'already in Augustine, we see Jerome's knowledge of Hebrew being singled out as the most notable feature of his great literary ability',³⁴ it might be slightly more appropriate to state that

34 The prestige of Jerome's multilingual competence was indeed consolidated at a very early stage. The author of *Hieronymus noster*, the earliest preserved biography of Jerome, evokes his trilingual competence by writing that he was 'learned in Greek, Latin, and Hebrew letters' (*litterisque Graecis ac Latinis atque Hebraicis doctus*). The author suggests that Jerome put his trilingual competence to the use of Christian faith (*Christi ... fidem adeptus*) by providing the Latin Church with a truthful text of the Old Testament. To the mention of Greek, Latin, and Hebrew, the anonymous biographer adds that Jerome also 'transcribed Daniel, who had spoken in the Chaldean language (*Chaldaico sermone locutum*), into a Roman way of speaking (*Romano stylo*)' (PL 22:182). On the 'Chaldean', i.e. Aramaic, of the book of Daniel, cf. Collins in *ABD* (2: 29): 'Daniel presents the interpreter

Augustine's appraisal of Jerome as an exegete and, concomitantly, of his multilingual competence shows an interesting evolution over time (cf. Vessey 1999a: 461–462; Schirner 2015: 288–318). More specifically, one can say that Augustine's appraisal of Jerome's multilingual competence gradually shifted in connection with the discussion between both authors regarding the value of the *Veteres Latinae* and, in particular, the interpretation of Ion. 4:6, where Jerome had introduced the controversial new translation *hedera*, 'ivy', instead of the usual *cucurbita*, 'gourd'.³⁵ Augustine was very concerned about this textual innovation in a pericope recurrent in liturgy, because it confused and even aroused North African worshippers. In *Ep.* 28.2.2 to Jerome (395), Augustine appears to have serious reservations about his addressee's Hebrew competence. He expresses his surprise about the idea that someone would still be able to discover new elements in the Hebrew versions, elements which would so far have 'escaped so many translators who were most highly skilled in that language (*illius linguae peritissimos*)', by whom he seems to mean the divinely inspired translators of the Septuagint (cf. Wasserstein & Wasserstein 2006: 126).

A change of attitude—which is undoubtedly due to Jerome's growing authority as a 'trilingual' biblical translator and exegete—is clearly noticeable in *Ep.* 82.5.34 (405) to Jerome, where Augustine writes to be eager to read his addressee's *Ep.* 57, 'on the best way of translating' (*de optimo genere interpretandi*), in order to find out 'in which way the knowledge of languages (*peritia linguarum*) of a translator' should be combined to the interpretation of biblical exegetes (cf. Lössl 2001b: 158). In *De ciuitate Dei* 18.42–43 (probably 424/425), Jerome is bracketed together with the Seventy translators, a mode of presentation which certainly involves a 'generous tribute' to Jerome by Augustine (Vessey 1999a: 462). The former are referred to by Augustine as 'men of great learning in the two languages (*linguae utriusque doctissimi*), that is, in both Greek and Hebrew' (cf. *De ciuitate Dei* 8.11, 15.13). Having stated that the Latin translations of the Septuagint also obtained authority in the Latin Church, Augustine refers to Jerome as

with an exceptional number of introductory problems. Most obvious, perhaps, is the bilingual character of the book: chaps. 11–2:4a and 8–12 are in Hebrew, while chaps. 2:4b–7:28 are in Aramaic'.

35 On the correspondence between Augustine and Jerome in general, and on the *cucurbita* incident in particular, cf. Jouassard (1956), Müller (1989), White (1990) (with English translations of the letters concerned), Fürst (1994a, 1994b, 1999), Hennings (1994), Lössl (2001b: 157–158), and Bazzana (2010). On the question whether Augustine made use of Jerome's Bible translation, cf. La Bonnardière (1986) and O'Donnell (1999).

a very learned man (*homo doctissimus*), skilled in all three languages (*omnium trium linguarum peritus*), who translated the Bible not from Greek, but from Hebrew into the Latin language.

Jerome's linguistic skills thus even exceed those with which the translators of the Septuagint are accredited by Augustine. Also in *Contra Julianum* 1.7.34 (421/422), Augustine argues that Jerome should not be despised because he was just a *presbyter*—‘Jerome, skilled as he was in the Greek, the Latin, and in addition in the Hebrew language (*Graeco et Latino, insuper et Hebraeo, eruditus eloquio*)’. Lastly, in *De doctrina Christiana* 4.7.15 (427), Augustine states to prefer Jerome's Bible translation from Hebrew over the *Veteres Latinae* going back to the Greek Septuagint. Without doubt, Augustine's changing attitude should be explained with reference to Jerome's growing and, in the end, established authority as a ‘trilingual’ biblical translator and exegete.

As can be seen from all the above, Augustine reflects extensively upon the exegetical value of Jerome's trilingual competence. However, he was anything but alone in integrating Jerome's rhetoric of *uir trilinguis* and *Hebraica ueritas*. When Rebenich (1993: 56 with n. 59 on 71) points out that Jerome's claims ‘were quickly reflected in the literature of the time’, he refers in particular to Jerome's and Augustine's contemporary Sulpicius Severus, who thematizes Jerome's trilingual competence in his *Dialogi* 1.8.3 (CSEL 1: 159–160) (cf. Borst 1958: 407). Similar references can be found in Prosper of Aquitaine's *Carmen de ingratis* and in Marcellinus Comes' (d. after 534) *Annales / Chronicon* 5.2 (s.a. 392) (MGH AA 11: 63). The Spanish chronicler Hydatius (c.394–c.470) touches on Jerome's command of Hebrew in his *Chronicon* 21 (51 [59]) (s.a. 415), writing that Jerome was ‘also highly skilled in the Hebrew alphabet’ (*elementorum quoque peritissimus Hebreorum*). To this he adds the strongly rhetorical observation that Jerome meditated day and night on the Old Testament, and that he firmly opposed Pelagianism and other stretches of heresy. Jerome's knowledge of Hebrew is thus integrated into a portrait of a ‘consummate Church Father’, who was ‘outstanding in all respects’ (cf. Rebenich 2002: 51). Vessey (2005: 145) rightly comments that ‘the language and imagery’ of this passage ‘are that of Jerome's many eulogies of Origen’ and thus echo Jerome's own efforts—of the period prior to the Origenist troubles—to present himself as a second Origen. More specifically, one could say that Jerome during this period moulded his ‘philological’ approach in biblical exegesis on that of Origen (Neuschäfer 1987).

The impact of Jerome's rhetoric is also evidenced in Gennadius of Marseille's *De uiris illustribus*, which was conceived as a continuation and completion of Jerome's work with the same title (Hamm 2002: 283). In his preface, Gennadius accredits Jerome with a command of no less than five languages,

apparently describing this exceptionally wide linguistic competence according to degrees of ‘impressiveness’. Apart from his relatively common fluency in Greek and Latin, Jerome is said to have mastered Hebrew and ‘Chaldean’ (Aramaic)—a rare competence which he made use of to translate parts of the Old Testament—and also Arabic, the knowledge of which allegedly enabled him to translate Job into Latin.³⁶ Rebenich (1993: 71 n. 59) explains the surprising mention of Arabic with reference to Jerome’s own scattered allusions to *Arabicus sermo* and *Arabica lingua*.³⁷ However, Gennadius displays a different attitude towards Jerome in §1 of his *De uiris illustribus*, where he emphasizes that Jerome, when he was working on his continuation of Eusebius’ *Chronicon* (i.e. around 389/391), certainly did not know any Syriac (cf. Mathisen 2009: 200). The same, rather detached attitude towards Jerome is also noticeable in §17, where Gennadius seems to apply Jerome’s rhetoric precisely to Rufinus (cf. Bardy 1948: 208), writing that thanks to his ‘gift for elegant translation’, Rufinus ‘opened up to the Latin Church (*Latinis exhibuit*) the greatest part of Greek literature (*maximam partem Graecorum bibliothecae*)’. I find it hard to explain why Gennadius does not try to minimize Rufinus’ merit to the advantage of Jerome—whose work he continues—and I would like to point out that the validity of applying Jerome’s rhetoric to Rufinus is even questionable.

Cassiodorus, who qualifies Jerome in his *Institutiones* as a ‘distinguished propagator’ (*dilatator eximus*; 1.21.1) and an ‘eminent multiplier’ (*multiplicator egregius*; 1.5.4) of the Latin language, in *Expositio Psalmorum* pref. 11 calls him ‘a most learned investigator of the Hebrew language’ (*Hebraicae linguae doctissimus inquisitor*). Back in *Institutiones* 1.21.1 he argues that thanks to Jerome’s Bible translation, ‘we hardly need to refer to the Hebrew source’ (*ut*

³⁶ On the complicated Arabic background of the book of Job, which also left its traces on the (Hebrew) language in which the book is written, cf. Guillaume (1963).

³⁷ The places mentioned by Rebenich (also cf. Millar 2010: 75–76) are Jerome’s preface to his translation of Job: *Haec autem translatio nullum de ueteribus sequitur interpretem, sed ex ipso Hebraico Arabicoque sermone et interdum Syro, nunc uerba, nunc sensus, nunc simul utrumque resonabit*, and the preface to his translation of Daniel: *Sciendum quippe Danieli helem maxime et Ezram Hebraicis quidem litteris, sed Chaldaico sermone conscriptos, et unam Hieremiae pericopen, Iob quoque cum Arabica lingua habere plurimam societatem*. Rebenich also refers to a 6th-century (?) vita entitled *Plerosque nimirum* (Mombritius 1978 [1910]: vol. 2, 31) which has it as follows (punctuation mine): *Quid uero de huius eleganti industria quam erga Latinos, Graecos, Hebraeos, Arabicos Caldaeosque in discendo elementorum apices habuit praestantius dici potest, quam ipsius ad Pammachium et Oceanum missa profitentur uerba: ‘dum essem iuuensis miro discendi feruebam ardore, nec iuxta quorundam praesumptionem ipse me docui’*.

*ad Hebreum fontem paene non egeamus accedere). More concisely, Gregory the Great in *Homiliae in Hiezechihel prophetam* 1.7.23 refers to the meaning of the biblical text as Jerome read it in *Hebraea ueritate*. John Cassian in § 5 of the preface to his *De institutis coenobiorum et de octo principalium uitiorum remediis* mentions Jerome's translations from Greek into Latin, but does not refer to Jerome's command of Hebrew. This is probably due to the fact that there are no Hebrew works with special relevance to monasticism, the subject on which Cassian is writing. Something similar holds true for Facundus of Hermiane (Bruns 2002a), who in his antiheretical *Pro defensione trium capitulorum* refers at 4.2.54 to Jerome's competence in Latin and Greek, but leaves Hebrew unmentioned. This is easy to explain: Facundus is arguing that Jerome was able to acquire an overview of all works of biblical exegesis in Latin and Greek, also of those authors who had instigated certain stretches of heresy. Jerome's competence in Hebrew is simply irrelevant in this connection.*

Isidore in *Carmen* 8—which was originally composed as a versified library motto (cf. Fontaine 1959: 738–741)—addresses Jerome as ‘translator, most learned in various languages’ (*interpres uariis doctissime linguis*), and in *Etym.* 6.4.5 deals with Jerome’s Bible translation, drawing primarily on Augustine’s *De doctrina Christiana*. Isidore designates Jerome as *trium linguarum peritus* and explicitly argues that ‘his translation is deservedly preferred over the others, for it is closer in its wording, and brighter in the clarity of its thought’. Again in *Etym.* 7.1.1 Isidore designates Jerome as ‘a most erudite man, skilled in many languages (*multarum linguarum peritus*)’. In *Etym.* 9.1.3 he stresses the importance of multilingual competence in the context of biblical exegesis. Integrating material from Augustine’s *De doctrina Christiana* (cf. above, p. 175f.), he argues that because of the fact that Hebrew, Greek, and Latin are the *tres ... linguae sacrae* (Sect. 7.2, p. 237), and

because of the obscurity of the holy Bible—a knowledge of these three languages is necessary (*harum trium linguarum cognitio necessaria est*), so that, whenever the wording of one of the languages presents (*sermo unius linguae attulerit*) any doubt about a name or an interpretation, recourse may be had to another language (*ad alteram recurratur*).

Although an actual command of Hebrew (and of Greek) had probably become virtually non-existent in the Latin West of Isidore’s days, and although Isidore himself knew no Hebrew and hardly any Greek (Riché³ 1972: 348–349; Fontaine 1959: 849–851; Barney *et al.* 2006: 7), a trilingual competence in the ‘sacred languages’ is still presented, by means of Augustine’s words, as a necessary

condition to a sound biblical exegesis. This trilingual competence is doubtlessly moulded on Jerome's linguistically based exegetic authority (cf. Kelly 1976: 369–370).

4 Preaching and the Propagation of Faith

As becomes clear from the general thread of Banniard (1992a), mastering the language of the people' is an obvious precondition for the transmission of Christian faith to the local population. Whereas Banniard focuses on those cases where the preacher adapts the variety and register of his Latin to those understood by his audience, I will in this section deal with cases where preachers are applauded for mastering a language different from Latin in order to address the indigenous population. The underlying assumption for such a positive appraisal is evident: it is only by virtue of the preacher's multilingual competence that Christian faith finds its way even to a 'barbarian' audience.

Augustine on Antoninus, Possidius on Augustine

The pragmatic-ecclesiastical value of a bilingual competence in Latin and Punic is at issue in two letters where Augustine explains how the ordination of Antoninus—the bishop of Fussala who had been accused of serious crimes (423)—had come about.³⁸ The linguistic background to these letters is that in Augustine's days, the use of Punic was still widespread among the rural (and often disadvantaged) inhabitants of Northern Africa, among whom Donatism was particularly successful. As is clear from the letters at issue, a proficiency in Punic was thus an important requirement in the vacancy for a bishop who was to govern this part of the population. In *Ep. 209.3* Augustine writes to Pope Celestine that he had at first been looking for 'someone apt and suitable' for the function of bishop, who was 'also trained in the Punic language' (*et Punica lingua ... instructus*) (cf. Adams 2003: 238). The motives for this linguistic prerequisite are explicitly spelled out in *Ep. Divjak 20.3*, where Augustine explains that he was not able to govern the entire region of Fussala himself, 'since many people not only in the city but also in the countryside had come over from the sect of Donatus'. Augustine found a suitable priest who apparently knew Punic, but this candidate withdrew at the very last moment. And so it happened,

³⁸ This affair has repeatedly solicited the attention of scholars; cf. Teske in WOSA (2/3: 393), Bardy (1948: 191), Frend (1983), Opelt (1985), Munier (1988), Merdinger (1999), and O'Daly (2004–2010).

Augustine explains, that Antoninus was chosen: ‘Hence I believed it useful to present for ordination the man who happened to be there, because I had heard that he also knew the Punic language (*quia et linguam Punicam scire audieram*)’. As can be seen from both passages, it was crucial to Augustine that the new bishop, who was to govern former Donatists, had a good command of Punic, in order to be able to preach to the rural population which actually or at least in his opinion was inclined to use Punic (Sect. 4.3, p. 136f., and 6.3, p. 205f.).

Likewise, linguistic skills also played an important part in the coming about of Augustine’s own ordination. Augustine’s biographer Possidius in *Vita Augustini* 5.2 evokes how bishop Valerius of Hippo, who ordained Augustine a *presbyter*, thanks God for providing him with such an excellent candidate as Augustine, who was able to ‘edify the Church of the Lord by the word of God and by wholesome doctrine’. Valerius himself, Possidius explains, was not apt for this task, since he was ‘a Greek by birth (*homo natura Graecus*) and less instructed in the Latin language and letters (*minusque Latina lingua et litteris instructus*)’ (cf. Bardy 1948: 191). Augustine was evidently well versed in Latin and thus perfectly apt to preach for Latin churches.

Eutropius on Cerasia, Faustus on a Fictitious Priest, and Auxentius on Ulfila

At some time between 394/395 and 431, the *presbyter* Eutropius—a friend of Paulinus of Nola—in his consolatory *Liber de similitudine carnis peccati* (CPL 567; PL suppl. 1: 529–556 [555]) praises Cerasia—probably a relative of Paulinus’ wife—on her efforts to convert ‘barbarian’ nations of the Iberian peninsula to Christianity by preaching to them in their own languages (Eymann 2002: 253; cf. Courcelle 1964: 111–112). He writes that ‘for the benefit of those pagans and barbarians of you, no less in mind than in language (*non minus mente quam lingua*)’;

you performed those things in particular; for in agreeable language (*sermone blando*) and to everyone in his own language (*et suo unicuique*), you introduced the knowledge of our God, and in a barbarian language (*lingua barbara*) you proclaimed Hebrew learning (*Hebraicam asserere doctrinam*).

Apart from the connection between (barbarian) speech and cognition (*lingua* and *mens*), this passage is remarkable for its positive appraisal of the mastery of a ‘barbarian’ language, be it only in conjunction with the propagation of faith. Another piece of (indirect) evidence is provided by the Lerinian monk Faustus of Riez (Kasper 2002: 264), who in *Ep. 3* (CSEL 21: 172) uses the multilingual com-

petence of a fictitious preacher as an analogy to the way God communicates to humans (Sect. 2.3, p. 92). Faustus conjures up the image of a priest who is 'gifted with a manifold command of languages' (*multiplici linguarum scientia praeditus*), and specifies that this priest is able to edify Hebrews, Greeks and Romans each in their own language. This gift for languages is implicitly presented as a valuable skill within the setting of preaching. The fact that the image of a multilingual priest could be used as a didactic analogy seems to suggest that 'code switching' was more common a phenomenon in the late antique practice of preaching than the limited number of explicit testimonies would seem to indicate. It is among others (cf. above, p. 165f.) in the same context that Auxentius in *De uita et obitu Ulfilae* (sc 267: 242) values Ulfila's competence in Greek, Latin and Gothic. Auxentius ascribes this trilingual competence to an 'apostolic grace' (Sect. 6.1, p. 199f.) and argues that Ulfila 'preached without intermission in the Greek, the Latin, and the Gothic language in the one and sole Church of Christ', thus implying that the Arian bishop possessed an equally profound competence in these three languages (cf. Burton 2002: 393).

5 Government and Negotiation

In a limited number of passages, multilingual competence is presented as an advantage in the context of worldly or ecclesiastical government and negotiation. A recurring notion is that multilingual competence renders the dilatory and obstructive intermediary of an interpreter superfluous (cf. Amalasunthia; Sect. 5.7, p. 192f.).³⁹ John Cassian in *Collationes* 16.1 (cf. Jerome, *Vita sancti Pauli* 4 [PL 23: 20], on the hermit Paul) emphasizes the abbot Joseph's elevated social status but also his smooth bilingual competence in 'Egyptian' (presumably Coptic) and Greek (*non solum Aegyptia, sed etiam Graeca facundia diligenter edocetus*), which enabled him to engage in direct and even elegant conversation with speakers of both languages, without the mediation of an interpreter (*non ut ceteri per interpretem, sed per semet ipsum*). Venantius Fortunatus in *Carmen* 9.1.92–94—in its entirety a poem in praise of king Chilperic—points out Chilperic's superior intellectual capacities and his verbal skills in general

39 On interpreters (in the specific sense of German *Dolmetscher*) in antiquity, cf. Gehman (1914), Franke (1992), Wiotte-Franz (2001), and McElduff (2013: 24–30). On the diplomatic role of interpreters throughout history, cf. Roland (1999), the first chapter of which is devoted to antiquity and the Middle Ages; unfortunately, Roland's account remains rather superficial.

(*ore loquax*). He argues furthermore that the king ‘distinguishes various vernaculars (*discernens uarias ... uoces*) without an interpreter (*sub nullo interprete*)’ and that ‘his single tongue reproduces the languages of the tribes’ (*et generum linguas unica lingua refert*) (cf. Borst 1958: 458–459). As Reydellet (2004: 12 n. 22) points out, Chilperic’s mastery of these local languages or varieties is represented as both receptive (*discernens*) and productive (*refert*) in nature. It is thus with a highly advanced multilingual competence that Chilperic is accredited by Fortunatus.

Cassiodorus in *Variae* 5.40.5—which is part of a fictitious letter where king Theoderic virtually praises his ambassador Cyprian—thematizes Cyprian’s competence in Latin, Greek, and Ostrogothic.⁴⁰ The author writes that Cyprian, when sent on an embassy to Constantinople, has no reason at all to be nervous. Greece has nothing to surprise him with, since he is schooled in the three languages just mentioned (*instructus ... trifariis linguis*). Multilingual competence is connected to a global image of intelligence and worldly sophistication, and it is suggested that thanks to his trilingual competence, Cyprian knows how to behave as an ambassador in the culturally superior—or considered to be so—Eastern empire (cf. Barnish 1992: 88 n. 5; Burton 2002: 393). Furthermore, Cassiodorus in *Variae* 8.21.7 values the multilingual competence of Cyprian’s sons, writing that although they are ‘boys of Roman descent’ (*pueri stirpis Romanae*), they also speak ‘our language’, namely Ostrogothic (*nostra lingua loquuntur and nobis ... quorum iam uidentur affectasse sermonem*). This ‘linguistic dedication’ of Cyprian’s sons seems to be interpreted as a good omen for the future of the Ostrogoths (cf. Barnish 1992: 88 n. 5; Arnold 2008: 116 n. 88). Likewise, Cassiodorus writes in *Variae* 8.22.5 that Cyprian’s sons were educated among adult men in order to become capable of being in charge. Verbal skills obviously occupy an important place in this context; the boys are not afraid to answer when they are permitted to, and they are able to ‘speak excellently in various languages’ (*uariis linguis loquuntur egregie*) (cf. Courcelle 1948: 259; Burton 2002: 393–394).

⁴⁰ Cf. Courcelle (1948: 259 n. 2) and Barnish (1992: 87). However, it is important to point out with Bartelink (2003: 1) that Theoderic was actually illiterate; cf. *Anonymus Valesianus* 14.79: *rex Theodoricus illitteratus erat et sic obruta sensu, ut in decem annos regni sui quattuor litteras subscriptionis edicti sui discere nullatenus potuisset.*

6 Laudatory Contexts

It seems that from the repeated positive appraisals in the above, ‘tangible’ contexts, an actually unmotivated, intrinsically positive appraisal of multilingual competence derived, which became a commonplace in laudatory texts of various specific kinds. An isolated example is offered by Augustine, who in *De civitate Dei* 8.12 positively values the bilingual competence in Greek and Latin of the philosopher Apuleius (Chelius 1988). As Hays (2004: 108) points out, this positive evaluation goes back to Apuleius’ own self-confident claims of bilingual competence.⁴¹ Another instance is provided by Isidore, who in *Chronica* 1.253—a note presumably going back to Suetonius’ *De vita Caesarum* 3.2⁴²—informs his readers that the emperor Titus (39–81) was ‘so very eloquent (*tanto facundissimus*) in both languages (*in utraque lingua*)’ that he could speech in Latin, but also compose poems and tragedies in Greek. This is a rather strong statement, presenting Titus as able to compose works in different literary genres in either language (cf. Banniard 1992a: 219). In my discussion of passages of this kind, I will focus on the positive evaluation of multilingual competence as an epistolary (Thraede 1970) and as a prefatory or dedicatory commonplace (Janson 1964). It is important to keep in mind that (especially) in these contexts, evaluations of multilingual competence are influenced to varying degrees by literary commonplaces and conventions of genre (cf. Introduction, p. 21f.).

Paulinus of Nola in *Ep.* 28.5 and 16.6 emphasizes the bilingual competence in Latin and Greek of his addressees, respectively Rufinus (Bardy 1948: 208) and a certain Jovius (Bardy 1948: 219–220). Ennodius in *Ep.* 1.5.10 praises the bilingual competence of his addressee’s son Avienus, who had recently been made a consul (cf. Gioanni 2006: 2).⁴³ Presenting Avienus as a product of a consummate education, Ennodius states that ‘he has learned all that is excellent in the Greek and in the Latin language (*quicquid Attica, quicquid Romana praecipuum habet lingua*)’. Moreover, Avienus’ bilingualism is closely linked to advanced rhetorical skills in both languages; Avienus is familiar with Demosthenes and Cicero, and ‘he has completed the rhetorical training in both languages (*utramque dicendi seriem*)’. Cassiodorus in *Variae* 2.3.4 compliments the

⁴¹ Namely in *Florida* 9, with regard to his own declamations (Helm 1921: 13): *tam Graece quam Latine, gemino uoto, pari studio, simili stilo*, and in *Florida* 18 (Helm 1921: 35): *uox mea utraque lingua iam uestris auribus ... probe cognita*.

⁴² Suetonius has it as follows: *Latine Graeceque uel in orando uel in fingendis poematibus promptus et facilis ad extemporalitatem usque*.

⁴³ For some other (brief and rather vague) references to Greek learning in Sidonius’ works, cf. Courcelle (1948: 259).

Gaulish nobleman Felix—who was perhaps a relative of Ennodius and who was made consul by Theoderic in 511 (Barnish 1992: xlv)—on his mastery of ‘Greek science’, writing that Felix ‘fed himself with the Attic honey of Greek doctrine (*Cecropii dogmatis Attico ... melle*)’ (cf. Courcelle ²1948: 259 n. 2).

In Sidonius Apollinaris’ correspondence, an addressee’s multilingual competence is often mentioned next to other perceivedly ‘laudable’, i.e. socioculturally valuable assets. In *Ep.* 4.3.6 Sidonius thanks the theologian Claudianus Mamertus for dedicating his *De statu animae* to him, and he praises this work and a hymn in verse by the same author (Amherdt 1999: 107). This connection of epistolography and poetical dedication is situated in one of the intellectual networks presented in the Introduction (p. 16f.), and it is important to note with Courcelle (²1948: 223) that the circles around Sidonius and Claudianus Mamertus reveal the existence of a ‘milieu lettré qui se passionne pour la philosophie et la littérature profanes des Grecs’. In § 6 Sidonius states that Claudianus ‘claims with good right the joint resources of his character (*morum*) and of his study of both languages (*studiorum linguae utriusque*)’.⁴⁴ Likewise, in *Carmen* 23 (vv. 99–100) Sidonius praises the father of his addressee Consentius (Fögen 1997–1998), describing him as ‘a man in whom sparkling wit and Roman sternness (*rigorque Romanus*) were set amid Attic elegance (*Attico in lepore*)’. Bilingual competence is not explicitly stated here, but it is strongly suggested. In vv. 233–240, Sidonius moves on to praise Consentius himself (cf. Loyen 1960: 148, 151, 196), suggesting that Consentius is equally advanced in Greek as he is in Latin. Sidonius indicates Consentius’ perfect bilingualism by means of the composition of this passage (*seu Latialiter sonantem ... seu linguae Argolicae rotunditate undantem*), and by means of the topical exaggeration that Consentius pronounces both Latin and Greek as native speakers of either language would do (cf. Pliny).

A remarkable case can be found in Venantius Fortunatus’ praise of the Merovingian king Charibert (c.517–567), *Carmen* 6.2.97–100. Pucci (2010: xxiii–xxiv) notes that this laudatory piece ‘speaks of the king’s singularity from multiple angles while seeking to alleviate divisions between secular and ecclesiastic

⁴⁴ Cf. Amherdt (1999: 140) for further references concerning Claudianus Mamertus’ actual competence in Greek. Claudianus Mamertus’ bilingual competence in Latin and Greek is also thematized in his (virtual) epitaph, integrated by Sidonius Apollinaris in *Ep.* 4.11.6.4–5. The epitaph claims that under Claudianus’ teaching, ‘a threefold library was illuminated (*triplex bibliotheca ... fulsit*)’, namely Latin, Greek, and Christian (*Romana, Attica, Christiana*). The juxtaposition of ‘Roman’ and ‘Greek’ to ‘Christian’ is remarkable, and presumably indicates Sidonius’ and Claudianus’ shared fascination for pagan Graeco-Roman learning in combination to Christian doctrine (cf. Courcelle ²1948: 243).

tical concerns'. One of these 'multiple angles' regards Charibert's smooth bilingual competence, supposedly in 'Franconian' and in Latin. Fortunatus argues that although Latin is not Charibert's mother tongue, 'the Latin language flourishes in your eloquence' (*floret in eloquio lingua Latina tuo*) (cf. Szövérffy 1971: 84; Farrell 2001: 10–12).⁴⁵ Fortunatus furthermore turns the assumption that people rarely become as fluent in a foreign language as they are in their mother tongue (cf. again Pliny) into a hyperbolic rhetorical question. 'If you surpass us Romans in [Latin] eloquence (*qui nos Romanos uincis in eloquio*)', he asks, 'how advanced in learned speech must you be then in your own language (*qualis es in propria docto sermone loquellea*)?' (cf. Riché 3¹⁹⁷²: 267).

7 Women's Multilingual Competence

In this final section I will discuss the authors' positive appraisals of multilingual competence in various contexts, insofar as they relate to women.⁴⁶ This decision may be methodologically and ideologically disputable, but seems justified by the less prominent places commonly occupied by women in the sociocultural milieus in which the relevant passages originated.⁴⁷ While Quintilian in the passage quoted at the beginning of this chapter focused on the bilingual education of Roman boys exclusively, it appears that the Christian tradition was even less tolerant than the 'classical' world with regard to 'female speech' generally (cf. Kruschwitz 2012). This can be seen from Paul's statement (1 Cor. 14:34–35) that 'women should remain silent in the churches, for they are not allowed to speak, but to be subject as is also stated by the law; and if they want to learn anything they should ask their men at home, for it is a disgrace if a woman speaks in church' (Fögen 2004: 231; cf. Barański 1989: 221). In this section, I will successively discuss Jerome's comments on the linguistic skills of his female pupils, and Cassiodorus' remarks on Amalasuintha's multilingual competence.

Jerome on the Multilingual Competence of His Female Pupils

Jerome's ideal of Hebrew learning gains an extra dimension in the context of his contacts with the Roman *feminae clarissimae* whom he guided in their

45 Cf. *Carmen* 6.2.7–8: *Hinc cui barbaries, illinc Romania plaudit; / diuersis linguis laus sonat una uiri.*

46 On women in the writings of early Christian authors generally, cf. e.g. Gould (1990).

47 On 'literate', 'educated', and 'learned' women in antiquity and beyond, cf. Hemelrijk (1999), Plant (2004), and de Hemptinne & Góngora (2004). On female writers in the Middle Ages, cf. Dronke (?1991) and Kadel (1995).

training in ascetism, biblical exegesis or *lectio diuina*, and in particular in their study of Hebrew (Krumreich 1993). The ascetic ‘reading group’ for aristocratic women which he guided was originally situated on the Aventine in Rome, centering around Marcella (Laurence 1996, Adkin 2004) and her mother Albina. It extended to Paula (the Elder), a relative and friend of Marcella, and via her to her four Christian daughters, most importantly Blesilla and Eustochium—Paula also had a son who, like his father, remained a pagan. The connection proceeded to Paula’s daughter-in-law, Laeta, who had a daughter also named Paula. More peripheral ‘nodes’ of this ‘micro-network’ were named Asella, Marcellina, and Felicitas (Kelly 1975: 91–103; Krumreich 1993: 68–107).

Multilingual competence, especially a command of Hebrew, was a crucial component of the ideal Jerome outlined for his female pupils (Laurence 1997). On a variety of occasions throughout his writings, Jerome dwells extensively on their linguistic competences. I will first survey the textual evidence and then provide a general assessment of it. In the preface to his translation of Esther, addressed to Paula the Elder and her daughter Eustochium, Jerome pays considerable attention to their competence in Hebrew (Laurence 1997: 417–418). He writes that in the past they had to ‘apply themselves (*studuitis*) to gain access to the libraries of the Hebrews’, implying by this rather vague formula that the process of learning Hebrew is a demanding one (cf. above, p. 153). In addition, he states that his addressees ‘assented to the struggles (*certamina*) of translators’, suggesting that Paula and Eustochium mastered Hebrew well enough as to make translations from Hebrew themselves—which is in fact not very likely (cf. below, p. 191)—but also that translation from Hebrew into Latin is a cumbersome task. Jerome thematizes Paula’s quick progress in Hebrew in *Ep.* 108, which is an elaborate funeral eulogy (*epitaphium*) on this female pupil of his (Cain 2013). In § 26.3 he evokes the efforts he had to make himself in order to master only some Hebrew and states that he has to study it unremittingly in order to maintain his command of it (cf. above, p. 153). On the contrary, he writes that Paula,

on making up her mind that she too would learn it, succeeded so well that she could sing the psalms in Hebrew and could pronounce the language (*sermonem ... resonaret*) without any peculiarity of the Latin language (*absque ulla Latinae linguae proprietate*).

Furthermore, Jerome in *Ep.* 39.1.2–3 praises the trilingual competence of Paula the Elder’s deceased daughter Blesilla (Kelly 1975: 98–99). First, he highlights her equally accomplished mastery of Latin and Greek. The criterion for the perfection of her bilingual competence is clearly her ability to pronounce

either language without an accent characteristic of the other one. Jerome goes one step further and states that Blesilla—just like Origen (the letter dates to 384)—‘had overcome the difficulties of the Hebrew language within few days, not even months’, specifying that her efforts were successful to the extent ‘that she was able to compete with her mother in learning the psalms by heart and singing them’. It is remarkable that Jerome here applies to Blesilla the comparison with Origen, which he normally reserves for himself (Vessey 2005). Again in *Ep. 107.9.1*, to Laeta on the education of her daughter Paula and of Christian girls in general, Jerome closely follows Quintilian’s instructions (cf. above, pp. 150–151). He advises Laeta to have her daughter learn Greek first (actually: ‘learn by heart a number of Greek verses’) but to let education in Latin follow immediately, in order not to corrupt Paula’s pronunciation of Latin with a ‘foreign accent’ (*in peregrinum sonum*) and by ‘alien elements’ (*externis uitiiis*) (cf. Kelly 1975: 273–274).

A last piece of evidence, which is not directly concerned with multilingual competence but has important bearings on our interpretation of the material, can be found in § 29.6 of Jerome’s *Ep. 22*, also known as the *Libellus de uirginitate seruanda* (Adkin 2003, Duval & Laurence 2011).⁴⁸ In this passage, Jerome advises Eustochium not to imitate the pronunciation (allegedly) characteristic of married women (*matronae*), who speak now with their teeth pressed together (*strictis dentibus*), then with their lips dissolved (*labiis dissolutis*). These women, Jerome specifies, are used to ‘chopping up’ their words (*dimidiata uerba*),⁴⁹ and prefer artificialities of speech over any form of ‘natural speech’ (cf. Fögen 2004: 231; Kruschwitz 2012: 209–210; Ferri 2015: 336 n. 12). Jerome’s advice implies an opposition between a sober, ‘natural’ pronunciation allegedly indicating a chaste and restrained way of life, and an affected, ‘unnatural’ pronunciation associated with a licentious lifestyle.

Apart from Jerome’s statement that ‘Paula and Eustochium assented to the struggles of translators’ (cf. above, p. 190), his female pupils’ multilingual competence is measured by their ability to pronounce Greek and/or Hebrew correctly, and to sing the psalms in Hebrew or to learn them by heart. These are in fact relatively modest standards for measuring one’s multilingual competences (cf. Kelly 1975: 97; Hilhorst 2007: 777), and they clearly indicate the boundaries within which Jerome thought a woman’s multilingual competence was to be valued. In addition, it is important to note that Jerome joins his

⁴⁸ On Jerome’s letters in general, cf. Conring (2001) and Cain (2009).

⁴⁹ The phrase *dimidiata uerba* also occurs in *Ep. 107.4.6* and *108.26.5*. Jerome’s source for this phrase is probably Minucius Felix, *Octauius* 2.1, where it is used to characterize children’s speech (Adkin 2003: 277; Duval & Laurence 2011: 241).

advice concerning women's multilingual competences to instructions regarding a decent pronunciation of the Latin language. The crucial point, in my opinion, is that Jerome in *Ep. 22* explicitly connects the 'tics' described above to *married* women, and explains them by stating that 'so much do they like adultery, even of the tongue' (Adkin 1993a). Jerome's rabid opposition against marriage is well known (Hunter 2007: 230–242), and his advice relating to linguistic skills and multilingual competence for women is, in my opinion, to be interpreted as a crucial part of his ideal of learning and ascetism (Feichtinger 1995). Since multilingual competence had for ages been the ideal for Roman boys, learning Hebrew and using it within certain 'decent' boundaries could help Jerome's female pupils to deny their 'femaleness' and thus to attain a truly ascetic way of life (cf. Brown 1988).

Cassiodorus on Amalasuintha

A second interesting appraisal of a woman's multilingual competence can be found in *Variae 11.1.6–8*, where Cassiodorus praises Amalasuintha (c.495–534/535), daughter of Theoderic and mother of Athalaric (Barnish 1992: 124, 145). Cassiodorus pays extensive attention to Amalasuintha's fluent competence in Latin, Greek, and Gothic (her *natiuus sermo*), connecting it to a globally positive appraisal of Amalasuintha's intellectual and verbal capacities. He rhetorically argues that while it is already an impressive merit to master one's own language well, it is all the more praiseworthy to be fluent in foreign languages. Cassiodorus furthermore elaborates on the practical advantage of multilingual competence on the level of diplomacy (cf. above, p. 185f.), arguing that thanks to her trilingual competence, Amalasuintha is a 'great and necessary safeguard' for people of different nations, since 'no one needs an interpreter (*nullus eget interprete*) when addressing the ears of our wise mistress'. In specific terms, Amalasuintha's trilingual competence makes the (dilatory and obstructive) intermediary of an interpreter superfluous: *non enim aut legatus moram aut interpellans aliquam sustinet de mediatoris tarditate iacturam* (Krautschick 1983: 96, 150–152; Wiotte-Franz 2001: 131, 162). Lastly, Cassiodorus notes that Amalasuintha's multilingual competence is crowned by 'the priceless knowledge of literature', thus accrediting her with an accomplished *Bildung*.

This passage is rather exceptional for its positive appraisal of literacy, verbal skills and multilingual competence in the case of a woman. However, it becomes clear by the end of the passage that to Cassiodorus' mind (and, probably, to that of his contemporaries), a woman's verbal skills can only be valued within certain boundaries. Cassiodorus writes that 'although she rejoices in such linguistic perfection' (*cum tanta gaudeat perfectione linguarum*),

she is so silent in public business (*in actu publico sic tacita est*) that you would think her indolent. She unties the knots of litigation by a few words (*paucis*); she quietly calms heated conflicts (*sub quiete disponit*); she acts in silence for the public good (*silentiose geritur publicum bonum*).

This passage involves an important differentiation of the global picture which has emerged from the above. It is not just because of her linguistic competences and her verbal skills that Amalasuntha is to be praised, but perhaps more importantly because she knows when and when not to make use of them. With the emphasis Cassiodorus lays on this verbal self-control and discretion, it is hard not to think that he is projecting a typically male ideal on a female ruler who would normally be inclined—in his opinion—to talk too much and on the wrong moments, exactly due to her gender. Although Amalasuntha's multilingual competence has received considerable attention in scholarly literature,⁵⁰ this is a crucial limitation that has not sufficiently been taken into account.

Summary

The assumption commonly made by early Christian Latin authors and underlying the whole of Part 2 of this study is straightforward: linguistic diversity is the consequence of the events of Babel, and hampers the propagation of Christianity. The present chapter was concerned with evaluations of an individual's multilingual competence as a way to counter this undesirable reality. Although some authors seem to think that multilingual competence is only valuable or justified when it serves the right purposes, I have not come across any instances where a clear distrust is shown towards multilingual competence—a distrust which is possibly expressed by the later adage *Graeca sunt, non leguntur* (cf. Siegmund 1949, Berschin 1980). Therefore, the overall approach of this chapter was to investigate exactly in which contexts it is that multilingual competence is positively valued or evaluated.

The first section paved the way for contextualizing the authors' global positive appreciation of multilingual competence by mapping out their views on the process of foreign language learning. Generally, the authors present it as a process demanding much time and effort and involving various difficulties.

⁵⁰ Discussions of this passage can be found in Courcelle (²1948: 258 n. 10), Riché (³1972: 98), Krautschick (1983: 150–154), Wolfram (1988: 325 n. 454), and Arnold (2008: 126).

They agree that in 'natural' circumstances, one can only come to master a limited number of languages, and that once one has mastered a foreign language, one has to pay continual efforts in order to maintain this mastery. Jerome complains on learning Hebrew and Aramaic, Augustine on learning Greek, and Paulinus of Pella on learning Latin. Although a *locus de modestia* is certainly involved in these complaints, it is safe to assume that learning a foreign language was regarded as a difficult task, and thus as a considerable merit when successful. Whereas Augustine gives a sensible and relatively sophisticated account of the process of language learning generally, it is utterly simplified by Isidore of Seville.

In the second section I have dealt with positive appraisals of multilingual competence within the context of translation (of the Bible and of scientific, theological, and exegetical writings). This is a very prominent context due to the upsurge of translation activities in Christian late antiquity, primarily in the 4th-century West. Various early Christian Latin authors (Rufinus, Jerome, Boethius, Dionysius exiguus) had an actual expertise in the various abovementioned types of translation and do not fail to proclaim their own approach and capacities superior to others'. Attention has also been drawn to the team of translators around Cassiodorus, whose accomplishments are frequently mentioned in an approving manner in the latter's *Institutiones*. In the context of translation, multilingual competence is often connected to scholarly 'seriousness', to a global 'learned' profile (*Bildung*), and in particular to the (actually self-evident) ability to assess the correctness of a translation in the source text. Apart from Boethius' self-assured rhetoric with regard to his project of scientific 'translation', the most striking instance is Jerome, who does not cease to refer to the *Hebraica ueritas* and to proclaim himself a *uir trilinguis*.

The third section was concerned with a closely connected yet still distinct context for positive appraisals of multilingual competence, namely the context of theology and biblical exegesis. This context owes its relevance in part to the fact that various controversies in early Christianity centered around the (preferable) translation of theological key terms (broadly speaking). Thanks to the intimate connection between multilingual competence on the one hand and seriousness, *Bildung*, and the ability to assess a translation on the other, the authors could easily rely on their multilingual competences as a kind of *argumentum ab auctoritate* in theological debate. A prominent case in point is the Origenist controversy insofar as it was conducted between Jerome and Rufinus, where the former singled out the latter's lack of multilingual competences in order to impair his credibility as a theologian. Furthermore, Augustine and—in his wake—Isidore point out the importance of trilingual competence in the context of biblical exegesis, although their own proficiency in the languages

involved was very limited. Accordingly, they present the biblical onomastica such as the ones composed by Jerome as highly valuable tools in order to bypass a lack of linguistic competences.

In an interlude I have tried to delve a little deeper into the reception and impact of Jerome's rhetoric of *uir trilinguis* and *Hebraica ueritas*. It has been shown that Augustine was initially reluctant to accept the products of Jerome's translation activities on liturgical grounds, but by the end of his life actively championed Jerome's multilingual competence. Jerome's self-advertising rhetoric was also successfully received and perpetuated by numerous Christian Latin authors other than Augustine.

In the fourth section I have turned to preaching and the propagation of Christian faith as a recurrent context for positive appraisals of multilingual competence. Attention has been paid (1) to the competence in Punic which is invoked by Augustine in order to account for his unfortunate ordination of Antoninus, the felonious bishop of Fussala, and (2) to Augustine's accomplished mastery of Latin which is emphasized by Possidius in his report of Augustine's own ordination. In both cases, the candidates benefit from their competence in the language in point because thanks to it, they will supposedly be able to address their future audiences successfully. Other cases where multilingual competence is presented as a precondition for preaching to 'indigenous' peoples have been identified in the works of Eutropius, Faustus of Riez, and Auxentius of Durostorum.

Section five was devoted to ecclesiastical or worldly government and negotiation as a context for positive appraisals of multilingualism. If a person masters various languages, s/he is able to engage in direct conversation with negotiators in their own languages. This versatility furnishes a conversational advantage for both parties, in that it renders the intermediary of an interpreter superfluous. Secondarily, multilingual competence against this background also bestows social prestige on the person possessing it. Cases in point have been identified in John Cassian, Venantius Fortunatus, and Cassiodorus.

In the sixth section I have dealt with actually or apparently unmotivated, intrinsically positive appraisals of multilingual competence in laudatory contexts, namely epistolary and dedicatory texts. In the cases discussed, a person's mastery of various languages simply becomes one praiseworthy characteristic among many. Given the stereotypicality of these instances, it becomes even more difficult than in the above contexts to assess whether an actual multilingual competence underlies the mention made. Often, multilingual competence is presented as a good indication of, and even a precondition for a person's 'educatedness', trustworthiness, seriousness, and ability to make important decisions.

In the seventh and final section, I have picked up some of the above themes insofar as they were discussed by early Christian Latin authors in connection with women. Attention was paid to Jerome, who praises the proficiency in Hebrew and Greek of the *feminae clarissimae* belonging to his scholarly micro-network, and to Cassiodorus, who praises Amalasuintha's competence in Latin, Greek and Ostrogothic. A crucial observation in this concluding section was that both Jerome and Cassiodorus assess a woman's multilingual competence positively as long as it does not exceed certain 'boundaries of decency'. Above all, the reviewed evidence tells us, a woman in Jerome's and Cassiodorus' opinion should be able to refrain from an 'excessive' use of her verbal skills (cf. Trudgill 1983 and esp. Holmes 1998 on the persisting prejudice that 'women talk too much'). Still, Jerome's and Cassiodorus' comments can be read as a considerable 'improvement' on the 'classical' *status quo* given by Quintilian, where foreign language study appears to concern upper-class Roman males exclusively.

Interpretations and Uses of ‘Unnatural’ Multilingual Competence

It has become clear in Chapter 4 that early Christian Latin authors generally conceived of linguistic diversity as an undesirable reality, not least due to the implications of the Babel narrative. Within the authors’ worldview, the undesirable reality of linguistic diversity could be countered not only by an ‘actual’ multilingual competence, but also by an ‘unnatural’ mastery of foreign languages. Having discussed the authors’ appraisals and uses of ‘actual’ multilingual competence in Chapter 5, I will now shift my focus to their interpretations and uses of ‘unnatural’ types of multilingual competence. The term ‘unnatural’ is intended to cover all forms of multilingual competence which have not been acquired through a ‘normal’ process of language learning. Thus, it includes the apostles’ ‘xenolalia’ at Pentecost—i.e. their speaking in languages they did not know before—, occurrences of sudden multilingual competence in hagiographic literature, and the theme of the ‘language of angels’. The apostles’ xenolalia as described in Act. 2:1–13 is indeed a central and seminal theme for early Christian discussions of unnatural multilingual competence (Borst 1958: *passim*; Law 2003: 104–105; Gera 2003: 21–22; Trabant 2006: 15–24). The relevant passage reads as follows:¹

When the day of Pentecost arrived, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a sound like a mighty rushing wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. And divided tongues as of fire appeared to them (*et apparuerunt illis dispertitae linguae tamquam ignis*) and rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit (*et repleti sunt omnes spiritu sancto*) and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance (*et coepere- runt loqui aliis linguis prout spiritus sanctus dabat eloqui illis*). Now there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men from every nation under heaven (*uiri religiosi ex omni natione quae sub caelo sunt*). And at this sound the multitude came together, and they were bewildered, because

¹ The English translation is the English Standard Version; the Latin citations are from the Vulgate.

each one was hearing them speak in his own language (*quoniam audiebat unusquisque lingua sua illos loquentes*). And they were amazed and astonished, saying: ‘Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language (*et quomodo nos audiuimus unusquisque lingua nostra in qua nati sumus*)? Parthians and Medes and Elamites and residents of Mesopotamia, Judaea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabians—we hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God (*audiuimus loquentes eos nostris linguis magnalia Dei*)’. And all were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another: ‘What does this mean?’ But others mocking said: ‘They are filled with new wine.’

In the Pentecost narrative the apostles appear to have acquired a full competence in languages they did not know before, as is clear from the fact that they are perfectly understood by native speakers of these languages. It is also important to note that the variety of ‘nationalities’ (and their languages) present during the events of Pentecost is already a rhetorical feature of the original Bible narrative. It should be mentioned that apart from this passage, the Bible also contains several references to the phenomenon of ‘glossolalia’ rather than xenolalia, i.e. ‘speaking in tongues, a form of ecstatic speech’ (Livingstone 3¹⁹⁹⁷: 682)—see Paul’s comments in 1 Cor. 12:6–11, 1 Cor. 14, and Rom. 12:6–8. These cases probably involve a kind of unintelligible ‘gibberish’ instead of the sudden accomplished command of foreign languages, and they are almost never interpreted in actual ‘linguistic’ terms by early Christian Latin authors.

In order to come to grips with the authors’ various interpretations and uses of unnatural multilingual competence, I will proceed in the present chapter by answering the following questions: (1) Do the authors thematize the unnatural character of the apostles’ xenolalia? (2) Do they connect the apostles’ xenolalia to the unity and universality of the Church? And (3) do they connect the events described in the Pentecost narrative to those described in the story of Babel? In the slightly heterogeneous concluding section (4), attention will be paid to unnatural multilingual competence as a theme in hagiographic literature, as well as to the authors’ scattered remarks about the ‘language of angels’.

1 The Unnatural Character of the Apostles’ Xenolalia

Relatively often, early Christian Latin authors rhetorically elaborate on the unnatural character of the apostles’ xenolalia at Pentecost. As a rule—and almost inevitably—this unnatural character is thematized in explicit or implicit opposition to the slowness and difficulty of the ‘normal’ or ‘natural’ process of learning a foreign language (Sect. 5.1, p. 152f.).

A first relevant instance is provided by Filastrius, who in this case, again, gradually seems to lose sight of the distinction between orthodoxy and heresy. In *Diuersarum hereseon liber* 104 Filastrius writes that according to the heresy ‘which disputes about the (one) language and the (various) languages’ (*quae de lingua et linguis ambigit*) (§1), linguistic diversity arose already before Babel, but pre-Babelic mankind possessed an ‘angelic grace’ by which it was able to master many languages (Sect. 3.1, p. 98f.). However, the heretics hold that God punished the tower-builders by introducing oblivion, so that the formerly effortless command of languages could from now on only be obtained through intensive study or with help from the Holy Spirit. Filastrius writes in §5 that at Pentecost, God bestowed ‘the complete mastery of languages’ (*omnem scientiam linguarum*) upon the faithful again through the Holy Spirit, and repeats in §6 that ‘mastering the languages of all the people is a feature of angelic virtue (*angelicae ... uitritutis*)’. He highlights the unnatural character of Pentecostal xenolalia—though he does not use a term equivalent to ‘unnatural’ himself—when writing that the apostles received the knowledge of all languages without any effort (*sine labore*). Furthermore, he points out that it also happened to others in the time of Peter and Paul that while preaching, a mastery of many/all languages ‘was bestowed upon them without instruction (*sine doctrina*)’.

Likewise, the unnatural character of the apostles’ xenolalia is an important theme in several of Augustine’s Pentecost sermons. In *Sermo 299B.2* Augustine writes that on the day of Pentecost, the apostles learned the languages of all nations ‘instantly’ (*illo momento temporis*), and presents their sudden multilingual competence explicitly as a gift from the Holy Spirit. It was ‘while the Holy Spirit was giving, dictating, and teaching’ that ‘they spoke in languages which they had not learned (*linguis quas non didicerunt*)’.² Augustine also contrasts the extensive scope of the apostles’ xenolalia to the confines of a person’s natural multilingual competence: ‘In their own nation they had learned one

² Augustine repeatedly stresses the fact that the apostles started to speak in languages which they were formerly totally unacquainted with, cf. *Enarrationes in Psalmos* 130.5, 138.8, *Ep. 199.8.23*, *In Iohannis epistulam ad Parthos tractatus* 6.10, *Sermo 80.5*.

language, or maybe two (*didicerant unam, forsitan duas*); but now they spoke, what shall we say, in three, four, five, six languages?³ In *Sermo 267.2* Augustine stresses that ‘all the people present had learned one language (*unam linguam didicerant*)’ and that the apostles began to speak in languages ‘which they did not know and had not learned’ (*quas non nouerant, nec didicerant*). In addition, he makes it clear that the apostles and those who were with them, 120 in sum (Act. 1:15), spoke not just in 120 languages, but ‘in the languages of all nations’ (*linguis omnium gentium*) (cf. Hoondert 1996: 294–295).⁴ As Borst (1958: 395) emphasizes, the described events according to Augustine not only took place instantaneously on the day of Pentecost, but last on into his own days, namely in the form of the Church, which speaks in all languages (Sect. 6.3, p. 205f.). They are thus given great ecclesiological significance.

A remarkable perspective is offered by Chromatius of Aquileia, who argues in *Sermo 31.1* that the apostles did not need to be translated—since they had God and the Holy Spirit as their translator (*Deum interpretem et sanctum spiritum*)—nor to be taught by a man—since they were taught by Christ, the ‘teacher of life’. Likewise, Leo the Great in *Tractatus septem et nonaginta* 75.2 emphasizes the sudden character of the apostles’ multilingual competence—*quam uelox* and *quam cito discitur*—and elaborates on the absence of a natural learning process as well as a normal communication process. The apostles did not need any translation (*interpretatio*), nor ‘habituation to correct usage’ (*non consuetudo ad usum*), nor ‘time for study’ (*non tempus ad studium*). Translation and language teaching, which are essentially connected to the confines of normal multilingual competence, are thus made irrelevant by the events of Pentecost. Relying on the paramount ‘unnaturalness’ of the apostles’ xenolalia, Dracontius in *De laudibus Dei* 2.143–153 goes so far as to state that the miracles performed by Christ should not in fact surprise us when we think of the events of Pentecost. Arator in *Historia apostolica* 1.3.119–138 stresses that when the apostles ‘learned’ to speak all languages at Pentecost,⁵ no letters were involved, no vein of genius dripping from the ear (*non ingenii stillauit ab aure uena*)—a reference to the belief that learning in normal circumstances ‘enters the mind through the ear’ (Schrader, Robert & Makowski 1987: 56 n. 7)—and no wax tablets. Whereas Arator mentions these elements as commonplace paraphernalia in the normal process of language learning, he argues by contrast that

³ Cf. *De ciuitate Dei* 22.5: *Homines quippe, quos unius uel, ut multum, duarum linguarum fuisse nouerant, repente linguis omnium gentium loquentes mirabiliter audiebant.*

⁴ On the apostles throughout Augustine’s works, cf. Feldmann (1988).

⁵ Arator obliquely refers to the connection between the Holy Spirit and xenolalia on other occasions, cf. *Historia apostolica* 1.5.221–227, 1.15.624–628, 1.22.954–957.

during the events of Pentecost, it was faith alone—a ‘new source of speaking’ (*noua uocis origo*)—that taught the apostles to speak in all languages.

Maximus of Turin thematizes the unnatural character of the apostles’ xenolalia in *Sermo 11.1*, in his exegesis of the mockers’ statement that the apostles are ‘full of wine’ (Act. 2:13). He explains that the apostles were thought to be drunk ‘because in them another language resounded (*loquella ... altera personabat*)’, which was contrary to their nature (*praeter naturam*). It should be pointed out that this involves a very specific interpretation of the biblical account, since the apostles’ mother tongue is said to be substituted by a different language. Maximus furthermore contrasts the events of Pentecost to the common limitations of human language, arguing that the apostles spoke in various languages because one language was not enough (*una loquella non sufficit*) to praise God in a worthy manner (Sect. 1.4, p. 53). Gregory the Great in *Homiliae in euangelia* 2.30.9 highlights the sharp divide between the apostles’ behaviour before and after they were inspired by the Holy Spirit. Before, they only knew their own native language (*natiuitatis suae singuli linguam nouerant*), and even in this language they did not dare to talk about Christ. But afterwards, when the Holy Spirit had ‘taught them in speech through the diversity of languages (*per diuersitatem linguarum*)’, they dared to talk about Christ even in a foreign language.

2 Pentecost Connected to Babel

The authors frequently involve the events of Babel in their explanation of the Pentecost narrative—sometimes, but not necessarily, constructing an opposition between both events (Rius-Camps 1988; Barański 1989: 214; Law 2003: 104–105; Sherman 2013: 301; Eskhult 2014: 311). A first relevant case can be found in Jerome’s *Commentarii in epistulas Paulinas* Eph. 1.10 (PL 26: 454). On a typological line of interpretation, Jerome here treats the events of Babel as an instance of *praefiguratio*—an Old Testament event announcing a New Testament one—in relation to the events of Pentecost. However, he does not explicitly present Pentecostal xenolalia as a reversal of the Babelic division of languages.

To the contrary, Augustine in *Enarrationes in Psalmos* 54.11 directly contrasts Pentecostal xenolalia to the Babelic differentiation of languages (cf. Eskhult 2014: 310). Following Hilary’s lead and paving the way for Cassiodorus, Augustine integrates this opposition into his exegesis of the verse *Submerge, Domine, et diuide linguas eorum* (Ps. 54:10). Having connected the psalmist’s plea to ‘confuse their languages’ to the events of Babel (Sect. 3.2, p. 105), he argues that whereas different languages arose due to the Babelites’ arrogance (*per super-*

bos homines), they were reunited thanks to the apostles' humility (*per humiles apostolos*). In other words, the Holy Spirit (*spiritus sanctus*) brought together what a spirit of pride (*spiritus superbiae*) had scattered.⁶ Augustine thus explicitly presents the xenolalia of Pentecost as the spiritual reversal of the Babelic confusion of languages. The opposition between Babel and Pentecost is developed in a nearly identical way—contrasting *superbia* to *humilitas* and *caritas*—in *Sermo 271.1* and in *In Iohannis euangelium tractatus 6.10* (cf. Hoondert 1996: 297–298; Law 2003: 105).⁷ In the latter passage Augustine succinctly states that

many languages were made out of one (*de una lingua factae sunt multae*); do not be surprised, pride did this (*superbia hoc fecit*). One tongue is being made out of many (*de multis linguis fit una*); do not be surprised, charity did this (*caritas hoc fecit*).

In this quotation Pentecost is very explicitly presented as the opposite and the spiritual reversal of Babel—the many languages are united by the one language of faith. In each of the three passages mentioned, the opposition between Babel and Pentecost is subsequently made part of Augustine's expositions on the ecclesiological significance of Pentecost; this dimension will be discussed below.

6 Cf. § 2 of the pseudo-Ambrosian sermon 36 on the feast of Pentecost (PL 17: 676A–B), where the preacher explicitly opposes the apostles' Pentecostal xenolalia to the Babelic confusion of languages, connecting the former to humility and the latter to arrogance: *Videte, fratres, uidete quid fecit superbia, et quid promeruit humilitas. Superbia diuisit linguas, quando turrim homines aedificare voluerunt pertingentem usque ad caelum; prius enim erat una lingua, qua homines se mutuo intelligebant, et propria mentis arcana inuicem communicabant: uerum ne perficerent superbi, quod cooperant, confusae sunt linguae, ac nationes diuisae sunt. Hodierna uero die cum propter humilitatem spiritum sanctum accepissent credentes, cooperunt omnibus linguis loqui.*

7 The opposition developed by Augustine is also integrated by Arator and by Gregory the Great. Arator writes in *Historia apostolica* 1.5.232–237 that whereas in Babel, there was a confusion of languages for a nation that had been one, at Pentecost there is one language for many nations (*pluribus una est*), a language which announces the Church and which will have 'harmonious sounds' (*concordes ... sonos*). Arator summarizes the opposition between Pentecost and Babel by stating that 'the humble order gathers again (*humilisque recolligit ordo*) what arrogant men scattered (*quod tumidi sparsere uiri*)' (cf. Hillier 1993: 27–28). Likewise, Gregory the Great writes in *Homiliae in euangelia* 2.30.4 that while the tower-builders lost their common language due to their arrogance, all languages were united in the apostles, 'who feared God in a humble way' (cf. Borst 1958: 432–433; Dekker 2005: 349).

An exceptional line of exegesis can be found in Apponius' *In Canticum cantorum expositio* 89–93 (part of the epilogue). Having associated the five characters taken on by the beloved in Song of Songs 5:1–2 to five languages—Hebrew, Greek, Egyptian, Latin, and Syriac/Assyrian (Sect. 7.2, p. 235f.)—Apponius comments on the verse (as he quotes it) *Erunt in die illa quinque ciuitates in terra Aegypti loquentes lingua Chanaan, et ciuitas Solis uocabitur una* (Is. 19:18a). Drawing in part on Jerome's *Commentarii in Isaiam* 7:19.18 (Sect. 7.3, p. 242), he states that *Chanaan* means ‘shining chalice’ and is to be associated with the Holy Spirit, which ‘filled the apostles with the languages of all the nations’. He furthermore argues that the five languages mentioned are united by the Holy Spirit, and that likewise, the five cities (*quinque ciuitates*) from Is. 19:18 ‘by drinking from this chalice’—the Holy Spirit—‘pronounce the mighty works of God almighty through one mouth (*uno ore*) or in one language (*lingua una*)’. Interestingly, Apponius states that the *ciuitas Solis* exactly symbolizes the Hebrew language, which in turn refers to Jerusalem, the cradle of Christian faith. Although Apponius does not explicitly contrast Pentecost to Babel, he presents the apostles’ xenolalia not only as a unification of the various languages, but also as a return to Hebrew, the single primeval language (Sect. 2.2, p. 60f.). However, this reference to Hebrew should be understood in a symbolic or spiritual sense (the unity of faith), not in an actual ‘linguistic’ one.

Another instance of this exegetic connection can be found in Helpidius Rusticus, who in the eighth tristichon of his *Historiarum testamenti ueteris et noui tristicha* gives a very commonplace description of how ‘Peter and the apostles speak in various languages (*uariis loquuntur linguis*)’. However, the tristichon immediately follows upon the one describing the events of Babel. It is thus safe to assume that Rusticus, too, interprets Pentecost as the opposite and—perhaps—the reversal of Babel (cf. Borst 1958: 431). Cassiodorus in *Expositio Psalmorum* 54.10 follows in the wake of Augustine (cf. above, p. 201) when contrasting Babel to Pentecost within his exegesis of the verse *Praecipa, domine, et diuide linguas eorum* (Ps. 54:10) (Borst 1958: 430–431; Resnick 1990: 56 n. 29). Having connected the prayer of the psalmist—David, in his opinion—to the events of Babel, Cassiodorus argues that God ‘divided the languages in anger’ at Babel, but at Pentecost ‘united them in grace (*propitius*) in his apostles’, thus explicitly contrasting both events.

3 The Apostles’ Xenolalia and the Uni(versali)ty of Christianity

In Chapter 4 I have dealt extensively with the authors’ use of language diversity as an impediment to the propagation of faith (Sect. 4.2, p. 132f.), and with the

surmounting of language diversity as an indicator of the unity and universality of Christianity (Sect. 4.4, p. 138f.). Strongly related to these beliefs and uses is the recurrent ecclesiological interpretation that the events of Pentecost—during which the apostles speak in all languages, a condition which the authors seem to believe persisted, at least with Paul—prefigure the universal spread of Christianity, across all languages and nations. This connection—the germ of which was already present in the biblical narrative—has been deployed by various authors in different ways, due primarily to the varying exegetical, doctrinal or polemical contexts in which this use occurs.

Jerome's Christian 'Triumphalism'

The connection between the apostles' xenolalia on Pentecost and the universality of Christianity is frequently made by Jerome. In *Ep. 120.9.9–10* he states that on the day of Pentecost, the apostles not only received the capacity of healing and performing miracles, but also—‘as they were to preach to many nations’ (*praedicaturi multis gentibus*)—the various kinds of languages, ‘so that already then it became clear which apostles were to proclaim the Gospel to which nations’. The notion that the apostles divided the languages among them—and thus also the regions of the world where they were going to preach—seems to be singular to Jerome. Jerome subsequently focuses on the apostle Paul, ‘who preached from Jerusalem up to Illyria and from there hastens to go via Rome to Spain, and who thanks the Lord that he speaks in languages more than all the apostles (*quod cunctis apostolis magis linguis loquatur*; cf. 1 Cor. 14)’. It is confirmed by Jerome that ‘he who had to preach the faith to many nations, had received the grace of many languages’. Further on in the same letter, Jerome restates that the apostles received ‘the various command of the languages of all nations (*diuersitatem linguarum uniuersarumque gentium*), so that they, about to announce Christ, would have no need for an interpreter (*nullo egerent interprete*)’.⁸

In *Commentarii in prophetas minores* Soph. 3.8/9,⁹ Jerome interprets the verse part *reddam populis labium electum* (Soph. 3:8–9) with reference to the

8 A less explicit instance can be found in *Ep. 78.14.3*, where Jerome relates how ‘through the divided languages of the faithful the entire world was filled by the preaching of the Gospel (*totus euangelica praedicatione mundus expletus sit*)’.

9 The passage on which Jerome is commenting in his own translation reads as follows: *Quapropter exspecta me, dicit Dominus in die resurrectionis meae in futurum; quia iudicium meum ut congregem gentes, et colligam regna; ut effundam super eas indignationem meam omnem iram furoris mei; in igne enim zeli mei deuorabitur omnis terra, quia tunc reddam populis labium electum, ut inuocent omnes nomen Domini, et seruant ei humero uno.*

first coming of Christ, when 'the apostles spoke in all languages and ... the one tongue of confession was given back (*unum confessionis redditum est labium*)' (cf. Eskhult 2014: 317). Jerome's exposition is more elaborate in *Commentarii in Ezechiem 1.3.5/6*, where he is dealing with the verses *Non enim ad populum profundi sermonis et difficilis linguae tu mitteris, ad domum Israel; neque ad populos multos et ignoti sermonis, quorum non possis audire sermonem: et si ad illos mitterem te, ipsi audirent te* (Ez. 3:5–6). In commenting on these verses, Jerome has God state that even if one would be sent to various nations, 'still my authority and power would overcome every difficulty'. Furthermore, he has God of the Old Testament wish that the time were approaching

when I will send out to all the nations and when I will give the gifts of languages (*linguarum datus sum gratias*) in order for my apostles to preach, and for them to bring the entire world (*totum mundum*) from the diversity of languages (*a diuersitate linguarum*), through the one faith (*una fide*), under my yoke (*meo subdant iugo*).

It is clear from this quotation that Jerome interprets the gift of languages at Pentecost as a prefiguration of the unity and universality of Christian faith, allegedly demonstrated by the fact that it integrates all the world's languages. A sense of Christian triumphalism clearly underlies this line of exegesis.

Augustine: Pentecostal Unity against Donatist Division

The ecclesiological significance of the apostles' xenolalia and of the religious unity of Pentecost is an important line of argument in Augustine's rhetoric against pagans and heretics in general, and against the Donatists in particular.¹⁰ There is an essential connection here with the use of linguistic diversity as an analogy to religious heterodoxy (Sect. 4.3, p. 136f.). In his exegesis of the psalm verse *Submerge, Domine, et diuide linguas eorum* (Ps. 54:10) in *Enarrationes in Psalmos* 54.11 (cf. Tholen 2010: 27 with n. 61), Augustine elaborates on the general ecclesiological significance of the religious unity of Pentecost in the following words:

If there are still pagans on the rampage today, it is just as well that they speak different languages (*expedit eis diuisas habere linguas*). If they

¹⁰ On the history of the Donatist Church in general, cf. Frend (1952), Markus (1983, 1999a), Maier (1989), Lancel & Alexander (1996–2002); on Augustine's anti-Donatist works, cf. Tilley (1999a).

aspire to one common language (*uolunt unam linguam*), let them come to the Church (*ueniant ad ecclesiam*), for there, though we differ in our natural languages (*et in diuersitate linguarum carnis*), there is but one language spoken by the faith of our hearts (*una est lingua in fide cordis*).

The religious or spiritual unity of Pentecost is thus connected to the unity of the Christian Church (Hübner 2004–2010a: 997–998). In this case, Augustine refers only to pagan dissension, not to Christian heretics or schismatics. The apostles' xenolalia stands for the (metaphorical) 'one language of faith', which is contrasted to the diversity of (actual) 'carnal' or worldly languages. From this ecclesiological perspective, religious unity—which corresponds to the 'Catholic' Church (Émery 1965, Evans 1999)—supersedes linguistic diversity—which is associated with the division prevailing among pagans.

This ecclesiological reading of the events of Pentecost is a prominent and highly stereotypical line of argument in Augustine's anti-Donatist Pentecost sermons.¹¹ It is important to keep in mind that in Augustine's polemical presentation—which is not necessarily in accordance with linguistic reality—the Donatists restrict themselves to Punic, allegedly the language characteristic of the 'African' Donatist Church (cf. below). Tholen (2010: 128–129), under the heading '*Africa—pars—totum*', summarizes Augustine's line of rhetoric as follows:

Die Begrenzung der Donatisten auf Afrika ist ein Punkt, den Augustin gerne herausstellt ... Ansonsten wird durch den Bezug auf Afrika ein Gegensatz aufgebaut zwischen den Donatisten, die die Kirche nur bei sich erhalten und bestehen sehen und den Katholiken, die sie auf der ganzen Welt ausgebreitet, über den ganzen Erdkreis und bei allen Völkern ausgebreitet wissen.

In *Sermo* 271.1—and with only slight differences in *Sermones* 266.2, 267.3, 268, and 269.1–2 (cf. Hoondert 1996; Tholen 2010; Dupont 2014: 99–101)—Augustine argues that the languages of all nations in which the apostles were

¹¹ Hoondert (1996: 299–300) distinguishes a separate group of anti-Donatist Pentecost sermons, which includes *Sermones* 267, 268, 269 and 271.1. The ecclesiological dimension of the apostles' xenolalia is referred to more concisely in the following passages: *Sermones* 71.17.28, 87.9, 89.1, 99.10, 111.2, 162A.11, 175.3, 229I.3, 265.10, 270.6, *Contra Faustum* 32.15, *De ciuitate Dei* 18.49, *Contra Cresconium* 2.14.17, *Contra litteras Petiliani* 2.32.74, *Enarrationes in Psalmos* 18.2.10, 130.5, *In Iohannis epistolam ad Parthos tractatus* 6.10, *In Iohannis euangelium tractatus* 52.8, *Ad Catholicos de secta Donatistarum* 11.29, and *Aduersus Iudeos*.

speaking prefigured the Church of the future (*futuram ecclesiam*). Taking as his point of departure the notion that the Holy Spirit is in the Catholic Church exclusively (cf. e.g. Hauschild & Drecoll 2004: xxvi–xxvii), Augustine inveighs against ‘those who have absolutely no share in this gift of the Holy Spirit’, namely schismatics in general and the Donatists in particular. He furthermore argues that just as on the day of Pentecost, ‘so now too the unity itself is speaking all languages throughout all nations’, and addresses his audience by stating that

by being established in this unity, you have the Holy Spirit, you that do not break away in any schism (*nullo schismate dissidetis*) from the Church of Christ which speaks all languages (*a Christi ecclesia loquente omnibus linguis*).

In *In Iohannis euangelium tractatus* 6.10,¹² Augustine argues that the Holy Spirit—‘divided in tongues, united in the dove’—indicated that ‘the apostles were sent to the nations’ and ‘if to the nations, then to all languages’. He furthermore argues that the languages of the nations have come together in the Church and rhetorically asks whether ‘only the language of Africa has separated’ (*una lingua Africæ discordauit*)—whether, in other words, ‘African’ Donatism constitutes a Church in its own right. The anti-Donatist implications of this passage are clear. When read from an ecclesiological point of view, the events of Pentecost announce the unity of the Church, across all languages of the world. When the Donatists allegedly restrict themselves to an African context, defined by the Punic language, they cut themselves off from the Church and as a consequence have no share in the Holy Spirit.

The same use of the apostles’ xenolalia occurs in a slightly different form in *Enarrationes in Psalmos* 147.19 (cf. also *Sermo* 162A.11, *In Iohannis euangelium tractatus* 32.7). Augustine here rhetorically asks why the Holy Spirit does not manifest itself in the multiplicity of languages ‘today’, as it did on the day of Pentecost—but he replies that it does. He explains that because on the day of Pentecost the Church still was to spread throughout the entire world, ‘the

¹² Tholen (2010: 188) provides the following ‘inhaltliche Schlagworte’ for *In Iohannis euangelium tractatus* 6.10: ‘Zunge Afrikas, Hochmut, Stolz, Irrtum’; cf. Tholen’s (2010: 198) summary of *In Iohannis euangelium tractatus* 6.9–10: ‘Zunächst bezieht sich Augustin ... auf den ‘Ort’ der Kirche ... Nicht Afrika allein ist Ziel des Handelns Christi, wie die Donatisten meinen, sondern die ganze Welt, symbolisiert durch die verschiedenen Sprachen, die beim Turmbau zu Babel zerstreut wurden, jedoch in der Kirche durch die Liebe erneut versammelt sind.’

miracle happened in each person as a presage of what would later be true of all'. He goes on to argue that 'the Church will grow until it claims all languages as its own'. Combining this line of rhetoric to the Pauline image of the body of Christ, he subsequently puts it as follows:

I dare to say to you, 'I speak in the languages of all men (*loquor omnium linguis*). I am in Christ's body, I am in Christ's Church. If Christ's body today speaks in the languages of all, I too am in all languages (*et ego in omnibus linguis sum*). Greek is mine, Syriac is mine, Hebrew is mine (*mea est Graeca, mea est Syra, mea est Hebraea*); mine is the language of all nations (*mea est omnium gentium*), because I am within the unity that embraces all nations.'

The gist of this passage is that Christian faith is not restricted to a single language or nation, as Augustine claims the Donatists would want it to be. In specific terms, Christianity should not be restricted to an African or Punic context, but should instead be valued for what it is, a universal religion.¹³ It should be emphasized once more that the linguistic particularism ascribed to the Donatists and the (linguistic) universality of the Catholic Church probably correspond to Augustine's line of rhetoric rather than to a religious and linguistic reality.

Augustine develops the same argument in even more explicit terms in *In Iohannis epistulam ad Parthos tractatus* 2.3 (cf. Tholen 2010: 242–245). He ironically describes the Donatists as 'those who greatly love Christ, and conse-

¹³ The same line of argument is developed in *Gesta collationis Carthaginensis a. 4n*, the proceedings of the Conference of Carthage against the Donatists, at 1.55 (CCSL 149A: 82–83): *Dicunt enim quod haec ecclesia, quam in lege et prophetis et psalmis accepimus praenuntiatam, opera saluatoris expressam et sanguine redemptam, apostolorum laboribus disseminatam atque plantatam incipientibus ab Hierusalem, ubi in centum uiginti animas simul congregatas sanctus spiritus uenit, eosque in quos uenit linguis omnibus gentium loqui faciens, euidentissimo signo docuit ecclesiam per omnes gentes futuram, et linguis omnium gentium loquituram; hanc ergo ecclesiam quae isto modo, ut praedictum et impletum est, ab Hierusalem sumpsit exordium, atque inde se in Iudeam et Samariam aliasque orbis terrae partes apostolorum praedicatione diffudit, in quorum litteris atque actibus ciuitates et prouincias inuenimus longe lateque distentas, in quas eam speciosis suis pedibus [Rom. 10:15] inuixerunt, unde et in Africam cresceret; hanc, ut diximus, ecclesiam dicunt isti, contra quorum errorem collegis nostris collationem defensionemque mandamus, Caeciliiani episcopi quondam Carthaginensis ecclesiae et sociorum eius nescio quibus peccatis perisse pollutam, atque in parte Donati eius reliquias remansisse. Cf. Frend (1952: 275–289) and Williams (1999).*

quently do not wish to be in communication with the city that slew Him’—by this referring to the city of Jerusalem (cf. van Oort 2004–2010a), where the events of Pentecost took place. The Donatists, he claims,

honour Christ by saying that he confined himself to two languages (*illum ad duas linguas remansisse*), Latin and Punic, that is, the language of Africa (*Latinam et Punicam, id est Afram*). Does Christ speak only two languages (*solas duas linguas tenet Christus*)? For those are the only two languages in the party of Donatus (*istae enim duae linguae solae sunt in parte Donati*)—they have no more.

Augustine warns his audience against the Donatists’ allegedly restricting themselves to an African context. By quoting Ps. 18:4–5, he makes it plain that the Church is and should be a universal Church. Augustine’s polemic is at its most vicious in *Sermo 162A.10*, where he addresses a fictitious Donatist by asking what the word ‘Catholic’ means. ‘Does it mean someone from Numidia?’, he suggests, and subsequently points out that it ‘clearly is not a Punic word, but a Greek one’. He advises his Donatist addressee to consult an interpreter, ‘for you are bound to be mistaken in language (*merito erras in lingua*), when you disagree with all other languages (*qui non consentis omnibus linguis*)’.

Briefer Instances: Chromatius, Leo, Faustus, Gregory the Great, Maximus, Isidore

Unsurprisingly, briefer instances of a connection between Pentecostal xenialia and the uni(versali)ty of the Church can be found in authors active later than Augustine’s lifetime. Chromatius of Aquileia argues in *Sermo 31.1* that the apostles spoke in various languages ‘in order to proclaim the Lord and creator of all languages (*linguarum omnium dominum et creatorem*) ... to the entire world (*uniuerso mundo*)’. Leo the Great states in *Tractatus septem et nonaginta 75.2* that on Pentecost ‘the proper voices of the single nations were made universal in the mouth of the Church’ (*propriae singularum gentium uoces factae sunt in ecclesiae ore communes*) and that ‘from this day onwards the trumpet of evangelical preaching has resounded’ (cf. Hoondert 1996: 303–304).¹⁴ Faustus of

¹⁴ There might be an affinity between Leo’s tractate and an anonymous *praefatio* edited by Moeller (CCSL 161A: 115): *Quia nihil sublimius collatum ecclesiae tuae probamus exordiis, quam ut euangeli tui praeconia linguis omnibus credentium ora loquerentur. Vt et illa sententia, quam superbae quondam turris extuctio meruit, solueretur, et uocum uarietas aedificationi ecclesiasticae non difficultatem faceret, sed augeret potius unitatem.* On the possible connection between both passages, cf. Moeller (CCSL 161B: 198): ‘Mgr C. Callewaert rap-

Riez states in *De spiritu sancto libri duo* 1 (CSEL 21: 126) that the apostles received the gift of languages in order to be ‘capable of instructing the faithful peoples’ (*idonei ... fidelium eruditio popolorum*)—the latter phrase was integrated by Isidore in *Etym.* 7.3.24. Gregory the Great argues in *Homiliae in euangelia* 2.30.4 that when the apostles were given the knowledge of all languages by the Holy Spirit, this indicated that ‘the Holy Church (*sancta ecclesia*)—filled by the same Spirit—was to speak in the voice of all nations’. Maximus of Turin explains in *Sermo* 56.3 that when the apostles received the gift of languages, this meant in real terms that

a man of the Hebrew people (*Hebraeae nationis homo*) proclaimed the glory of Christ in fluent Roman eloquence (*Romanae facundiae eloquentia*), and that foreign ears (*peregrinae aures*) learned of the redemption of the human race in their own language (*propria loquella*), since they did not understand it when the language of the Jews was proclaiming it (*Iudaea praedicante lingua*).

The universal propagation of Christian faith is thus contrasted to Judaism, confined as the latter allegedly is, geographically to Judaea and linguistically to the Hebrew language. Accordingly, the apostles’ sudden fluency in foreign languages is interpreted as a prefiguration, geographically confined to Jerusalem, of the universal spread of Christianity. Lastly, Isidore of Seville writes in *Quaestiones in uetus testamentum* Ex. 28.1 (PL 83: 300) that when the apostles received the gift of languages from the Holy Spirit, ‘the entire world was filled by the preaching of the Gospel’.

A Special Case: Pentecostal Xenolalia and the Apostles’ Creed

A peculiar exegetical context for this use—and for the connection between Babel and Pentecost (Sect. 6.2, p. 201f.)—can be found in Rufinus’ *Expositio symboli* 2, an important representative of the genre of ‘Symbolerklärung’ or elucidation of the Apostles’ Creed (Bruns 2002c: 661). As Kelly (1960: 1–2) points out, Rufinus’ *Expositio symboli* is almost the earliest elucidation of the Creed which has come to us from the West, but the story it contains certainly goes back to an older tradition. In this work, the events of Pentecost provide the originating context for the Apostles’ Creed. Rufinus describes how the apostles, by the coming of the Holy Spirit,

proche cette préface du sermon 75, *de Pentecoste*, I de saint Léon le Grand, qu'il considère comme un commentaire de celle-ci, pour la plus grande partie.'

were enabled to speak a variety of different languages, with the result that they found no nation strange to them (*eis nulla gens extera*), and no foreign speech beyond their powers of comprehension (*nulla linguae barbariae inaccessa ... et inuia*).

He goes on to describe how the apostles were commanded by God to ‘travel separately to different countries’ to preach Christianity, and how before leaving they assembled and drafted the Creed, in order to deliver the same message wherever they would preach, as a ‘token of their common agreement in the faith’. Interestingly, Rufinus contrasts the origin of the Apostles’ Creed to the events of Babel. On the point of being separated, the Babelites built a ‘tower of pride’ and were accordingly punished by the ‘confusion of languages’. The apostles, to the contrary, in drafting the Creed when they were about to leave on their mission, erected a ‘tower of faith’ (*turrem fidei*) and were rewarded for this with the knowledge of all languages. Rufinus concludes that ‘in the one case you had the proof of sin, in the other, of faith’. Closely connected to the apostles’ Pentecostal xenolalia, the origin of the Creed is thus explicitly contrasted to the confusion of languages at Babel.

Presumably by way of Rufinus, this traditional exegetical nexus exerted some influence in Latin Christianity. Venantius Fortunatus in *Carmen* 11—entitled *Expositio symboli*—at 1.2 connects the events of Pentecost to the origin of the Apostles’ Creed, writing that when the apostles had received the gift of languages, they ‘composed this Creed among themselves ... in order that when they would depart from each other they would preach this rule in the same way among all nations’. Likewise, Isidore of Seville in *De ecclesiasticis officiis* 2.23.1–5—a section entitled *De symbolo*—integrates Rufinus’ exegesis in an only slightly modified version.

4 Unnatural Multilingual Competence in Hagiography, and the ‘Language of Angels’

In this somewhat heterogeneous section, I will deal with early Christian Latin authors’ comments on cases of unnatural multilingual competence which do not directly relate to the events of Pentecost, more specifically with the theme of sudden multilingual competence in hagiographic literature,¹⁵ and with the

¹⁵ Cf. Kaster (1988: 20 n. 4): ‘For one’s speech to change suddenly from the vernacular to a language of culture was the sign of a miracle ... The opposite change was a mark of

subject of the ‘language of angels’. However, with regard to the former issue, it seems inevitable to assume that both the Pentecost narrative of Act. 2:1–13 and Paul’s various references to ‘speaking in tongues’ played a role of importance in fuelling the development of unnatural multilingual competence as a theme in the genre of hagiography. As such, this provides a clear additional instance of what has been termed by Van Uytfanghe (1985) the biblical ‘imprint’ on hagiographic literature.

Jerome: A Miraculous Command of Syriac and Greek

An instance of hagiographic literature involving sudden multilingual competence occurs in Jerome’s *Vita sancti Hilarionis* 13. The story is about an officer of the Emperor Constantius who has been possessed by a demon from childhood onwards and who hopes at last to be exorcised by Hilarion. Jerome explains that the officer comes from a country which lies ‘between the Saxons and the Alemanni’ and which ‘is known to historians as Germania, but is now called Franconia’. He thus makes it clear that the officer is entirely unacquainted with any ‘oriental’ language. When narrating the encounter between Hilarion and the officer, Jerome describes how on being questioned by Hilarion in Syriac, the officer leaps up and replies in that same language. With a phrasing reminiscent of his (negative) aesthetic evaluations of ‘Semitic’ languages (Sect. 7.4, p. 249f.), Jerome specifies that

pure Syriac was heard (*Syra ad purum uerba resonare*) from the mouth of a barbarian (*de ore barbaro*) who used to know only Franconian and Latin (*qui Francam tantum et Latinam nouerat*) and this without the absence of a hiss, or an aspirate, or an idiom proper to the speech of Palestine (*ut non stridor, non aspiratio, non idioma aliquod Palaestini deesset eloquii*).¹⁶

Jerome subsequently describes how the demon confesses by what means he entered into the officer, and how Hilarion again questions the demon/officer in Greek—another language which the officer did not know before—for the benefit of the interpreter who accompanies him and who knows Greek and Latin but no Syriac.¹⁷ Xenolalia, the sudden command of a language one did

demonic possession’, with reference to Jerome’s *Vita sancti Hilarionis* 22 (this should be to § 13, the passage here discussed); Cain (2013: 425): ‘The divinely ‘assisted’ acquisition of foreign languages ... is a minor theme in late antique monastic literature’.

¹⁶ Cf. Bardy (1948: 139–140) and Millar (2010) on the linguistic situation in contemporary Palestine.

¹⁷ On the interpreter accompanying the officer, cf. Wiotte-Franz (2001: 109, 152, 266). Adams

not know before, is here exploited as a strong manifestation of an 'unnatural' event. It seems safe to assume that this notion was inspired or at least fuelled by the apostles' xenolalia in the Pentecost narrative. Remarkably, here as in cases of a 'natural' competence in a foreign language, the benchmark for a perfect mastery of a foreign language is a 'native' competence in the language concerned (Sect. 5.1, p. 152f.).

Gregory the Great: A Miraculous Command of Greek and 'Bulgarian'

Another instance of hagiographic literature involving an 'unnatural' command of languages can be found in the *Dialogi* by Gregory the Great, at 4.27.11–12 (cf. Dekker 2005: 351). A poor boy falls severely ill, enters delirium but comes to himself again. He claims to have been in heaven and to have received the capacity of speaking in all languages (*accepi ... ut linguis omnibus loquar*; cf. below). The boy states that in order to prove this, he will speak Greek, a language he was completely ignorant of before. The boy's master speaks Greek to him and the boy indeed turns out to be able to reply in the same language. Moreover, there is also a Bulgarian (*Bulgar*) present, and the boy—who has been 'born and raised in Italy'—is able to talk to this man 'in the same barbarous language' (*in eadem barbara locutione*) and even 'in such a way as if he had been brought forth from this nation'. Gregory concludes that

all those who heard him were amazed, and from the proof of the two languages (*ex duarum linguarum experimento*) which they knew he did not know before (*quas eum antea scisse non nouerant*) they believed him on all the other things which they were not in the least able to prove.

Apart from the indication that not only Greek, but also 'Bulgarian' (possibly to be identified as Old Church Slavonic) cannot have been unheard of in Gregory's Italy of the 6th century, some interesting points can be singled out in this story. First of all, it seems to imply the idea that multilingual competence is difficult to acquire (Sect. 5.1, p. 152f.), and that the sudden command of all languages is simply 'unnatural' or 'superhuman'. Second, the command of all languages is closely connected to a 'heavenly' capacity. As was suggested above, it is very conceivable that the notion of unnatural multilingual competence as a 'heavenly' capacity was strongly inspired by the Pentecost narrative and by Paul's references to 'speaking in tongues'. The phrasing used by Gregory

(2003: 275, 294) interprets this story with particular attention to the languages 'normally' mastered by the figures featured.

(*accepi ... ut linguis omnibus loquar*, cf. 1 Cor. 13:1) corroborates this assumption. Lastly, it is worthy of note that here again, the perfect command of a formerly unknown language is indicated by the ‘native’ mastery and/or pronunciation of that language.¹⁸

The ‘Language of Angels’

Observations on the topic of the ‘language of angels’ are scant among early Christian Latin authors (cf. Hilhorst 2007: 780).¹⁹ Jerome touches on the topic of ‘angelic’ or ‘mystical’ languages in the preface to his translation of the writings of Pachomius, the Egyptian founder of coenobitic monasticism (Skeb 2002a: 540). Jerome’s comments at issue primarily relate to his translation of eleven Pachomian *Epistulae* (Boon 1932, Joest 2014). According to Skeb (2002a: 541; tr. mine), these letters are concerned with spiritual themes and contain ‘cryptograms’ which ‘in a kind of ‘secret language’ make a spiritual use of the letters of the Coptic alphabet’. At 9.8 of his preface, Jerome refers to the belief that an ‘angel passed on the knowledge of a mystical language (*linguae mysticae scientiam*)’ to Pachomius and to the ‘Pachomian’ abbots Cornelius and Syrus, and that they used this mystical language in order to write and speak to each other by means of a special alphabet (*alphabetum speciale*). Although this passage does not reflect Jerome’s own opinion, it shows that at least some early Christians assumed the existence of (a) mystical language, closely associated to angels. Gennadius of Marseille in *De uiris illustribus* 7—the entry devoted to Pachomius—also mentions an *alphabetum mysticis tectum sacramentis* which surpasses normal human cognition, but he does not explicitly present it as given by an angel.

Although the issue of angelic communication is dealt with a couple of times by Augustine,²⁰ I am not inclined to follow Barański (1989: 216), who straightforwardly states that

the vast majority of theologians, with Augustine and Thomas Aquinas at their head, argued, on sound and extensive biblical authority, beginning with passages from the first chapters of Genesis, that the angels were able to speak.

¹⁸ Borst’s (1958: 434) interpretation of this story seems a little far-fetched: ‘Alle Sprachen also spricht man im Himmel, und es ist schon eine überirdische Gnade, Griechisch zu können.’

¹⁹ To the contrary, this theme is a very popular one in scholastic thought, cf. Chrétien (1979).

²⁰ Neither Madec (1986) nor Van Fleteren (1999) address the issue of the ‘language of angels’ when dealing with Augustine’s angelology.

When Augustine explains in *De cura pro mortuis gerenda* 15.18 that angels may reveal some information to the dead about the people who survive them, this implies that angels are able to communicate, but not necessarily that they are able to speak. This point becomes very clear in *Enchiridion ad Laurentium de fide et spe et caritate* 15.59, where Augustine states with regard to angels that ‘they may say something (*uel dicant aliquid*) not outwardly to the ear (*non ad aurem forinsecus*), but inwardly in the mind of man (*intus in animo hominis*)’ (cf. Fischer 2004–2010 on *foris* vs. *intus* in Augustine). Whereas this statement suggests a ‘spiritual’ interpretation of angelic communication—*contra Barański*—it does not seem justified either to follow Roling (2012: 229–230), who argues that in *De ciuitate Dei* 16.6.1, Augustine ‘explicitly rejects any attempt to define more closely what angelic language might be like’. A closer look at the passage concerned shows that Augustine is actually dealing with the ‘language of God’, arguing that

God does not speak to the angels in the way (*nec sic loquitur angelis Deus, quo modo*) that we speak to each other, or to God, or to the angels, or as the angels speak to us (*ipsi angeli nobis*), or as God speaks to us through them. Rather, He speaks in His own ineffable way.

As can be seen from this quotation, Augustine does not explicitly reject attempts to define the language of angels. In the Latin text, it even seems justified to supplement *ipsi angeli nobis* with the verb form *loquuntur*,²¹ although this is still no compelling evidence for the belief that angels literally (physically) ‘speak’. Likewise, it is implied in *De trinitate* 3.3.8–3.4.9 that angels ‘speak’ on behalf of God, but nowhere is it specified in which particular way they do so. In dialogue with Barański and Roling, I would like to conclude that Augustine does not explicitly dismiss the possibility that angels actually speak, but that his conception of how angels ‘speak’ should probably be understood metaphorically and ‘spiritually’, most importantly by analogy with Augustine’s ‘spiritual’ conception of the ‘language of God’ (Sect. 2.3, p. 88f.).

In *Ep. 45* which is—interestingly—addressed to Augustine, Paulinus of Nola argues in §7 that when the apostle Paul says, ‘if I speak with the tongues of

²¹ Viz. because the relevant portion of the sentence contains no other verb: *Nec sic loquitur angelis Deus, quo modo nos in uicem nobis uel Deo uel angelis uel ipsi angeli nobis siue per illos Deus nobis, sed ineffabili suo modo; nobis autem hoc indicatur nostro modo.* In reading *hoc* in the final phrase I follow the Teubner edition against *hic* in CCSL (48: 507). Both editions in principle offer Dombart & Kalb’s text, and neither of them mentions variants in the critical apparatus.

angels' (1 Cor. 13:1), this shows that angels 'have a certain form of speech peculiar to their nature or ... to their kind' (*proprium quendam ... suae naturae uel ... gentis ... sermonem*), and that this speech 'transcends human sensation and speech' (*humanis sensibus et eloquiis altiorem*). Furthermore, Paulinus points out that Paul may have used this phrase in a figurative way, and that it is shown by the 'voice of God' that there can be utterance without a tongue. Although Paulinus' observations are concerned with the 'language of angels' only obliquely—he is actually dealing with the question whether humans will have a tongue after the resurrection—they suggest rather clearly that he conceives of it in a 'spiritual' way.

Likewise, Gregory the Great explains in *Moralia in Iob* 2.7.9–10 that God and his angels 'speak' to each other in a purely spiritual way. At 28.1.1–10 he argues that God may indicate his will to humans by mediation of angels, when 'words of supernal speech are heard' (*supernae uerba locutionis audiuntur*). Gregory makes it clear that in those cases which are documented in the Bible, it is not God Himself who was speaking, but that He 'formed (*formauit*) His words, which he wanted to be heard by humans, by the mediation of a spiritual creature (*rationali creatura administrante*)'. This implies that in Gregory's opinion, the 'language of angels' is in principle a 'spiritual' kind of communication, but that all the same, angels are able to give shape to physical entities which perfectly resemble human words. Lastly, Isidore of Seville in *Etym.* 9.1.12 straightforwardly states that Paul's words (cf. above, p. 212) indeed raise the question in which 'tongue' angels speak, but that Paul says this 'by way of exaggeration, not because there are tongues belonging to angels'.

The texts analyzed show that as a rule, early Christian Latin authors have a rather vague, 'spiritual' and 'metaphorical' conception of the 'language of angels'. Although Poirier (2010: 26–29) in his monograph on angelic languages in classical Jewish and Christian texts devotes an excursus to 'the relative lack of Hebrew-speaking angels in early Christian sources', he does not arrive at an actual discussion of possible early Christian identifications of the 'language of angels' as Hebrew. Rather, his excursus is a brief survey of Christian views on Hebrew as the primeval language and the language of Creation (Sect. 2.2, p. 60f.). A Christian identification of the 'language of angels' as Hebrew could have been prompted by the Jewish tradition and in particular by the book of Jubilees, which describes how God, by mediation of an angel, teaches Hebrew to Abraham (Poirier 2010: 10–14; Sect. 2.2, p. 62f.). On the basis of the passages discussed above, it is possible to fill the gap in Poirier's investigation by stating that this identification does not occur in early Christian Latin literature.

Summary

In this chapter, I have maintained the term ‘unnatural’ to cover those cases where people acquire multilingual competence without going through the normal, intensive and time-consuming process of learning a foreign language (Sect. 5.1, p. 152f.). The most prominent case of unnatural multilingual competence is undoubtedly the apostles’ xenolalia at Pentecost (Act. 2:1–13), which was put to various (exegetical) uses by early Christian Latin authors. Furthermore, it seems that in a later stage the Pentecost narrative (and Paul’s references to glossolalia) fuelled the theme of a miraculous multilingual competence in hagiography, thus providing a clear instance of the biblical ‘imprint’ on hagiographic literature (cf. Van Uytfanghe 1985). The purpose of this chapter was to explore the various ways in which early Christian Latin authors have interpreted and deployed the ‘phenomenon’ of unnatural multilingual competence.

The first section of this chapter was devoted to those early Christian Latin authors who exactly thematize the unnatural character of the apostles’ Pentecostal xenolalia. It has become clear that it is a common feature in the authors’ treatments of the events of Pentecost to contrast the apostles’ xenolalia with the cumbersome process of learning a foreign language. Learning a foreign language requires time, effort, study, repetition, teachers, and didactic tools, and the number of languages which can normally be mastered is restricted. None of these characteristics apply to the apostles’ xenolalia at Pentecost, which is effortless, instantaneous, and ‘universal’ or limitless. The ‘unnaturalness’ of the events of Pentecost is rhetorically elaborated upon by Filastrius, Augustine, Chromatius, Leo, Dracontius, Arator, Maximus of Turin and Gregory the Great.

In the second section I have turned to those authors who construct an exegetical connection between the events of Pentecost and those of Babel. It has become clear that this exegetical connection could take on various possible shapes. First of all, Jerome interprets Babel as the Old Testament *praefiguratio* of the Pentecost episode in the New Testament—without explicitly writing in terms of an antithesis. The latter option is exactly the one followed by Augustine in his exegesis of Ps. 54:10, *Submerge, Domine, et diuide linguas eorum*. In this rich exegetical nexus Augustine explicitly presents Pentecost as the opposite to and the reversal of Babel. The idea that men’s languages were scattered at Babel but spiritually united at Pentecost is repeated by Augustine on other occasions, be it without reference to the psalmist’s plea at 54:10. Augustine’s line of exegesis is explicitly perpetuated by Arator, Cassiodorus (with reference to Ps. 54:10), and Gregory the Great; it is suggested by Helpidius Rusticus’ juxtaposition of the tristicha paraphrasing Babel and Pentecost respectively;

and it is further complicated by Apponius, who makes it a part of his exegesis of the five characters taken on by the beloved in Song of Songs (Sect. 7.2, p. 235f.).

The third section was concerned with those passages where early Christian Latin authors interpret the apostles' xenolalia at Pentecost as a symbol of the unity and/or universality of Christianity. This ecclesiological interpretation and the uses deriving from it are evidently based on the global assumption that linguistic diversity hampers the spread of Christian faith (Sect. 4.2, p. 132f.). While the point is made in a rather straightforward way by Jerome, Chromatius, Leo, Faustus, Gregory the Great, Maximus, and Isidore, Augustine by contrast intensely deploys the ecclesiological interpretation of Pentecost in his rhetoric against the Donatists. He argues that the apostles' xenolalia announced the universality of the Church, which was to speak in all languages, whereas the Donatists separate themselves from the one Church by allegedly restricting themselves to (Latin and) Punic, which Augustine consistently presents as the characteristically 'African' and 'Donatist' language (Sect. 4.3, p. 136f.). This interpretation is variously elaborated upon by Augustine in several sermons against the Donatists. A particular 'doctrinal' connection between the xenolalia of Pentecost and the Apostles' Creed was presented (on the basis of a preceding tradition) by Rufinus, who states that the apostles drafted their Creed when they were about to part and preach in various languages after Pentecost. This interpretation enjoyed some resonance thanks to Venantius Fortunatus and Isidore of Seville.

The fourth and final section of this chapter dealt with two separate cases of unnatural multilingual competence, namely the theme of xenolalia in hagiographic literature, and the theme of the 'language of angels'. The textual evidence for both themes is relatively scant yet revealing. As regards the commonplace of xenolalia in hagiographic literature, I have analyzed Jerome's narrative of the Germanic officer who is suddenly able to speak Syriac, and Gregory the Great's description of the Italian boy who suddenly speaks Greek and 'Bulgarian'. It has been observed that the sudden mastery of a foreign language is considered a very strong manifestation of an unnatural change, and that the accomplished mastery of a foreign language—even when it is acquired in an 'unnatural' way—is measured by the perfect mastery and/or pronunciation allegedly characteristic of a native speaker. With regard to the language of angels, early Christian Latin authors remain extremely vague. Jerome writes that the mystical language of Pachomius and his companions was passed on to them by an angel, and Augustine seems to imply that angels have their own mode of communication. For Augustine as for Paulinus of Nola, Gregory the Great, and Isidore of Seville, it seems safe to conclude that they have a very

blurred, but certainly an 'immaterial', 'spiritual', and 'metaphorical' conception of the 'language of angels'. No attempt is made to identify the language of angels as Hebrew.

PART 3

Language Description

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The Language Level

It has been argued in the Introduction (p. 10) that the rise of Christianity appreciably altered the linguistic horizon of Western intellectuals. Greeks and Romans in pagan antiquity paid only very limited and unsystematic attention to foreign, 'barbarian' languages (Werner 1992: 20). If they did compare languages, they mostly restricted themselves to Latin and Greek (Schöpsdau 1992: 115, 135). In Christian late antiquity, however, intellectuals are bound to deal with languages different from Latin and Greek. Whereas I have tried to establish in Chapter 3 how the authors explain the origin of linguistic diversity, and in Chapter 4 how they evaluate and 'use' this reality, I will investigate in this chapter how they attempt to come to grips with connections existing between languages in this diverse and complicated reality, in terms of language classifications, selections, affinities, and comparisons. In principle, I will not deal with the authors' interpretations of intralingual variation, but I will discuss Isidore's classifications of the Greek dialects and of the historical stages of Latin, since he does not seem to distinguish neatly between varieties and 'languages'.¹

The scanty biblical coordinates for the subject matter of this chapter are the implicit notion of Hebrew as the primeval language (Sect. 2.2, p. 60f.), next to the 'Table of Nations' of Gen. 10, already introduced in Gen. 9:18–19. This Table of Nations describes how the earth was divided among the sons of Noah, named Sem, Ham and Japhet, and their respective descendants. It has been connected in various ways to the Babel narrative of Gen. 11 (Ch. 3, p. 96f.), and the descendants enumerated in it have given rise to various numbers of languages and nations believed to exist in the world. In Latin Christianity, the Augustinian computation that there were 72 languages and nations immediately after Babel became normative (Sect. 3.3, p. 110f.). With regard to linguistic selections, one should also mention the passages in the Gospels where reference is made to the trilingual inscription on Christ's cross (Ioh. 19:20; Luc. 23:38; cf. Geiger 1996).

¹ With regard to the terminology used in Latin to indicate 'language', mostly *lingua* or *sermo*, reference can be made to the studies by Díaz y Díaz (1960), Codoñer (2001, 2007), and Rochette (2009). Another way by which speakers (writers) of Latin often refer to their own language is the personal pronoun *nos* followed by a verb form such as *dicimus*. This is anything but a neutral way of referring to one's own language, since the personal pronoun 'we' is evidently a powerful marker of group identity (Mühlhäusler *et al.* 1990: 168–206).

With these elements in mind, I will investigate the authors' approaches to relations between languages. More specifically, I will ask (1) which language classifications the authors develop and on which criteria these classifications are based; (2) which selections of languages they propose and which criteria they use in doing so; (3) which linguistic affinities they perceive and describe; and in a last, slightly heterogeneous section (4) in which ways and for what reasons they compare different languages to each other in terms of 'vices' and 'virtues'.

1 Language Classifications

One approach the authors could adopt in making sense of contemporary linguistic diversity consists in developing language classifications, by distinguishing different categories, stages or varieties on the basis of various possible criteria. Augustine in the sixteenth book of *De ciuitate Dei* extensively discusses the ethnolinguistic situation immediately after Babel (Sect. 3.3, p. 110f.), and Jerome frequently comments on genealogical relations between individual languages (Sect. 7.3, p. 238f.). Nevertheless, it is not until the end of the 5th century that early Christian Latin authors propose language 'classifications' in the specific sense of the term. The only relevant sections I have been able to identify are in the works of Arnobius the Younger and Isidore of Seville.

Arnobius the Younger: A Threefold Classification of the World's Languages

By the end of the 5th century, Arnobius the Younger in *Commentarii in Psalmos* 104 (CCSL 25: 159–160) proposes an innovative model of language classification (Borst 1958: 416–417; Major 2013: 35–38). Arnobius develops his classification by combining the 'thousand generations' (*mille generationes*) from 1 Par. 16:15—understood as thousand countries or nations—and the number of 72 post-Babelic languages calculated by Augustine on the basis of Gen. 10 (Sect. 3.3, p. 110f.). The classification he proposes when combining these passages follows the traditional division of the world among the three sons of Noah, namely Sem, Ham, and Japhet (Gen. 9:18; Gen. 10).

To each of these three 'Noachides', Arnobius attributes a portion of the world, each containing a definite number of languages and nations. In Arnobius' opinion, the part given to (1) Sem stretches from Persia and Bactria to India and Rhinocorura(e). This portion of the world contains 27 languages 'belonging to barbarian speech' (*sermone barbarico*) and 406 nations which are distinguished by their countries (*patriae*) but not by their languages. In

order to elucidate this distinction, Arnobius refers to the one Latin language, which covers ‘various countries’ or ‘nations’ (*diuersae ... patriae*), namely Brutii, Lucani, Apulians, Calabrians, Picenes, Tuscans, etc. Arnobius here seems to integrate Augustine’s notion that various nations may use the same language (Sect. 3.3, p. 110f.). The disconnection of languages and nations—which runs counter to the Table of Nations in Gen. 10 but which can be justified by the ‘historical’ distance between Arnobius’ times and the ‘facts’ described in Gen. 10—is a necessary step in reconciling the 1,000 nations with the 72 languages. It is remarkable that Arnobius does not mention a primeval language and that nowhere in his classification he integrates Hebrew. However, the fact that he is (presumably) dealing with the post-Babelic linguistic situation does not preclude the notion that there was a single primeval language or protolanguage before, possibly to be identified as Hebrew.

Arnobius goes on to discuss the part assigned to (2) Ham, which stretches from Rhinocorura(e) to Gadira and which contains 394 countries and 22 languages. On a geographic basis, these 22 languages are further distinguished into three groups, namely (a) a ‘Punic’ language family ‘on the side of the Garamantes’, (b) a ‘Latin’ language family in the North, and (c) a ‘barbarian’ language family in the South, where Ethiopians and Egyptians live. Lastly, the part of the world given to (3) Japhet covers Media and Babylonia and contains 200 countries and 23 languages. Having established these three groups of nations and languages, Arnobius is now able to conclude that in sum, there are 72 languages, but 1,000 countries, ‘which are situated in this order in the tripartite world (*in tripartito saeculo*)’—which does not include any of Europe to the North of Italy. Arnobius’ threefold language classification can be visualized as follows:

- | | | |
|-------------------------------|---------------------|---------------------------|
| (1) ‘Semitic’ languages (27) | used by 406 nations | (‘barbarian’ languages) |
| (2) ‘Hamitic’ languages (22) | used by 394 nations | (i) Punic languages |
| | | (ii) Latin languages |
| | | (iii) barbarian languages |
| (3) ‘Japhetic’ languages (23) | used by 200 nations | |

The classification elaborated by Arnobius is highly innovative, connecting ethnographic and geographic knowledge to biblical information and to elements from Augustine’s model of language history. As Major (2013: 36) points out, it is striking that Arnobius does not even seem to rely on the available sources from the chrono- and ethnographical tradition (Inglebert 2001), such as the *Liber generationis* (in Latin) or—in my opinion less probably—the *Diamerismos* or Epiphanius of Salamis’ *Ancoratus* (in Greek). Nevertheless, given the precision of Arnobius’ information on ethnic, linguistic and geographic

topics, it might be prudent to allow for the possibility of a lost source text more explicitly than Major does. Leaving aside the question of the sources, it is safe to conclude that Arnobius' exposition provides the most refined and the most tangible ethnolinguistic classification in early Christian Latin literature prior to Isidore. It is all the more remarkable—but probably due exactly to its atypical character—that Arnobius' innovative classification does not appear to have exerted any influence prior to Bede (672/673–735), who integrates the classification and explicitly references Arnobius in *De temporum ratione liber* 66.

Isidore: A Threefold Classification of the World's Languages

At the beginning of the 7th century, Isidore of Seville in *Etym.* 9.1.8 develops a threefold classification of the languages surrounding the Mediterranean basin, according to perceived phonetic characteristics and the respective preferred places of pronunciation (cf. Burton 2008a: 42; Eskhult 2014: 338–339). Within this phonetic-articulatory classification, (1) the Hebrews and Syrians are cited as representatives of 'oriental' nations (*Orientis gentes*), who 'crunch together their speech and words in their throats (*in gutture*)'; (2) the Greeks and (other) inhabitants of Asia Minor are quoted as instances of 'central' nations (*mediterraneae gentes*), who 'strike their speech (i.e. their tongue?) on the palate (*in palato*)'; and (3) the Italians and Spaniards (Iberians) are quoted as examples of 'occidental nations' (*Occidentis gentes*), 'who gnash their words against their teeth (*in dentibus*)'. It should be noted that—in the absence of a source text known to us (cf. Reydellet 1984: 37)—this is a very innovative threefold language classification. With 'place of articulation'—guttural, palatal, dental—it maintains a principle of classification that is radically disconnected from the biblical genealogical criteria found in Gen. 10, and it is conveniently adjusted to the linguistic reality of Isidore's days. It should also be pointed out that Isidore's classification is an important exception to Percival's (1987a: 18) general observation that 'traditional Western grammarians before the 16th century seldom if ever referred to the points of articulation'.

It is striking that this paragraph reads as an exhaustive classification—cf. the repeated use of *omnes ... gentes*—while it actually includes only a very limited range of languages. It is for instance remarkable that Isidore does not integrate information on Punic, Gaulish, or Germanic, languages which received some attention among early Christian authors prior to him. It is very conceivable that this classification reflects a conscious selection of languages that allegedly 'matter', a selection, that is to say, which is politically or ideologically biased. On this line of thought, Reydellet (1984: 37 n. 14) suggests that 'le silence sur les Gaulois n'est sans doute pas involontaire et reflète une situation politique et culturelle'. The languages left untreated by Isidore would thus be excluded from

the selection of ‘civilized’ languages and banned to the residue of ‘barbarian’ ones—provided, again, that Isidore is not relying on an ancient source unknown to us.

Three remarks can be added to this. First, it is noteworthy that the verbs used by Isidore in order to phonetically characterize the three ‘civilized’ language groups—*collidunt*, *feriunt*, *frangunt*—each seem to have a slightly negative ring (cf. the definitions in Lewis & Short, which all include some ‘aggressive’ de- or connotations). One might rather expect either a neutral qualification of all three language groups, or a stated preference for the sounds of a particular language group. Second, and relatedly, it is noteworthy that the Greeks are simply reported to ‘strike their speech on the palate’, while nothing is said about the alleged superior sonority of Greek stated by Isidore at 9.1.4. Third, I would like to differentiate the interpretation proposed by Borst (1958: 454), who argues that in Isidore’s opinion, each of the three ‘sacred languages’ represents one language group in the phonetic-articulatory classification (resp. guttural/Hebrew, palatal/Greek, and dental/Latin). It is true that the three-fold classification proposed at 9.1.8 maps well onto the doctrine of the ‘three sacred languages’ posited at 9.1.3. However, Isidore himself does not establish the connection between both conceptions, and to him both conceptions are apparently situated on two different levels. The primacy of the ‘three sacred languages’ is religious (biblical and exegetical) in nature (cf. below, p. 237), while the present classification appears to be developed to produce order in the complicated linguistic reality of Isidore’s time (and possibly—depending on the question of the sources—of the centuries preceding him), by means of an apparently synchronic and objective principle of classification, and regardless of the ‘biblical’ coordinates and of the genealogical relations between the languages concerned.

Isidore: A Fivefold Classification of the Greek Dialects

Isidore also provides a classification of the ‘varieties’ or ‘dialects’ of Greek in *Etym.* 9.1.4–5. Having established the superior aesthetic qualities of Greek (Sect. 7.4, p. 254), he states that the ‘variety’ (*uarietas*) of the Greek language ‘can be distinguished in five parts (*in quinque partibus*)’. The varieties distinguished by Isidore are (1) the *coenedo*, *mixta* or *communis* variety, that is, the variety ‘which everyone uses’, the *χωτνή*; (2) Attic, that is, ‘the Greek of Athens, which all the authors of Greece used’; (3) Doric, which Isidore oddly states ‘the Egyptians and Syrians employ’; (4) Ionic; and (5) Aeolic, ‘which they say the ‘Eolisti’ spoke’. Isidore concludes by stating that when observing the Greek language, ‘we find settled differences of this kind (*eiusmodi certa discrimina*), because their speech was divided (*dispertitus*) in this way’. Reydellet (1984: 34 n. 8)

points out that the fivefold subdivision of the Greek language is the traditional distinction maintained by the ancient grammarians, and refers to Diomedes and Servius. Indeed, Diomedes in his *Ars grammatica* states that ‘there are five languages of the Greeks (*quinq̄e sunt linguae Graecorum*), namely Ionic, Doric, Attic, Aeolic, and κοινή’ (*KGL* 1: 440). Servius, furthermore, writes in his commentary on Vergil’s *Aeneid* (3.122) that ‘there are five Greek languages (*quinq̄e Graecae sunt linguae*), namely Aeolic, Ionic, Doric, Attic, and κοινή’. While it thus proves right that the traditional distinction of ancient (pagan) grammarians is fundamental to Isidore’s classification, there are some significant differences between the grammarians’ and Isidore’s versions. In addition, Isidore’s classification of the Greek ‘dialects’ is more refined than those found in Servius and Diomedes.

First, the glottonyms used by Isidore differ from those found in Servius and Diomedes, although it is tricky to draw conclusions from this difference, given the fluctuating character of glottonyms in the manuscript tradition. Second, the terminology used by Isidore to designate intralingual variation in Greek—*uarietas, dispertitus, partes, discrimina*—is absent from Servius’ and Diomedes’ accounts. Third, Isidore explicitly states the criteria on which his fivefold classification is based. These criteria are mixed in nature, including diatopic, diastratic, and diaphasic dimensions, but lacking a diachronic one. The Doric and Aeolic varieties are defined with reference to a diatopic criterion and the Attic variety with reference to a diatopic and a diaphasic one—it is allegedly the language used in all of Greek literature. The κοινή is defined with reference to a diastratic criterion, as it is used by all layers of the population. When this variety is called ‘mixed’ as a consequence of its common usage, this possibly, but not necessarily involves a notion of corruption—as is evidently the case with the *mixta* stage of Latin (cf. below, p. 231). Fourth, the sequence of varieties maintained by Isidore differs from the sequence followed by Servius and Diomedes. It becomes clear that this sequence is not merely coincidental when we take a look at two other passages where Isidore mentions two of the Greek dialects accompanied by the rank they occupy in the above classification. At 9.2.34 Isidore writes that the Greek Eliseans or ‘Aeolides’ descend from Elishah, and that ‘hence also the fifth language in Greek is called ‘Aeolic’’.² At 9.2.80 he notes

² Cf. Jerome, *Quaestiones Hebraicae in Genesim* 10.4–5; *De Ionibus, id est de Graecis, nascuntur Elisei, qui uocantur Aeolides: unde et quinta lingua Graeciae Aeolis appellatur, quam illi uocant πέμπτην διάλεκτον*. Note that Isidore does not use the Greek term διάλεκτος, which he must have known from this passage, and which is also used by Quintilian, *Institutio oratoria* 1.5.29: *Cuius difficilior apud Graecos obseruatio est, quia plura illis loquendi genera, quas διαλέκτους uocant, et quod alias uitiosum, interim alias rectum est.*

that the Greek Dorians ‘take their origin and their name’ from Dorus, and adds that ‘after them is named the third language of the Greeks, called Doric’. However, when Isidore elsewhere maintains the sequence of his fivefold classification, this does not necessarily mean that he is proposing a classification entirely of his own. The fact that Jerome, too, in his *Quaestiones Hebraicae in Genesim* 10.4–5 refers to Aeolic as ‘the fifth dialect’ of Greek indeed suggests the contrary.

Given Isidore’s lacking competence in Greek (cf. 5. Interlude), it is almost certain that the classification he proposes for this language is at least in part based on a no longer extant source, either a coherent work of an identifiable author, or possibly anonymous intermediary drafts or notes belonging to what Fontaine (1959: 316, 624, cf. 750) terms ‘l’héritage scolaire indirect’. While his classification of the varieties of Greek is very interesting both conceptually and terminologically, it remains ultimately impossible to gauge its precise degree of originality.

Isidore: A Fourfold Periodization of Latin

In *Etym.* 9.1.6–7 Isidore develops his well-known fourfold classification of the historical varieties of the Latin language, designated by Borst (1958: 450) as ‘der erste uns erhaltene große Entwurf einer lateinischen Sprachgeschichte’ and by Müller (2004: 208) as ‘dem ersten überlieferten Sprachstadienmodell des Lateinischen überhaupt’.³ In full, the classification reads as follows:

Latinas autem linguas quattuor esse quidam dixerunt, id est priscam, Latinam, Romanam, mixtam. Prisca est, quam uetustissimi Italiae sub Iano et Saturno sunt usi, incondita, ut se habent carmina Saliorum. Latina, quam sub Latino et regibus Tusci et ceteri in Latio sunt locuti, ex qua fuerunt

3 On the difficult question of the originality of Isidore’s classification of the diachronic varieties of Latin, cf. Müller (2004: 222–223): ‘Hat Isidor das Vier-Stufenmodell des Lateinischen selbst entworfen? Hat er es einer nicht mehr bestimmbaren Quelle entlehnt? Sein Eröffnungssatz *Latinas autem linguas quattuor esse quidam dixerunt* (*orig.* 9, 1, 6) besagt nicht zwingend, daß Sprachgelehrte vor ihm es aufgestellt und vertreten hätten. Die Bemerkung läßt sich auch so verstehen, daß sowohl die Bezeichnungen *lingua prisca*, *lingua latina*, *lingua romana*, *lingua mixta* wie auch die mit ihnen verbundenen Vorstellungen schon in Umlauf gewesen waren, bevor er sie in ein zeitlich gestuftes System brachte. Eben diese Zusammenfassung der vorgefundenen Termini und Begriffe zu einer schlüssig wirkenden Theorie der Sprachentwicklung und die Abstimmung des Ganzen mit der augustinischen *aetates*-Lehre muß seine Leistung gewesen sein. Aus heutiger Perspektive gesehen, ragt sie über seine Zeit weit hinaus, weil sie den ersten überlegten Versuch darstellt, die Geschichtlichkeit einer Sprache historisch zu begründen.’ Likewise Müller (2005: 21–23) and Müller (2006: 490).

duodecim tabulae scriptae. Romana, quae post reges exactos a populo Romano copta est, qua Naeuius, Plautus, Ennius, Vergilius poetae, et ex oratoribus Gracchus et Cato et Cicero uel ceteri effuderunt. Mixta, quae post imperium latius promotum simul cum moribus et hominibus in Romanam ciuitatem irruptit, integritatem uerbi per soloecismos et barbarismos corrumpens.

Isidore writes that ‘some have said (*quidam dixerunt*) that there are four Latin languages (*Latinae ... linguae quattuor*), namely ancient (*prisca*), Latin (*Latina*), Roman (*Romana*), and mixed (*mixta*’). Unlike the classification of the Greek dialects, this classification is mainly diachronic in nature (periodization), with an important diaphasic component (literary authorities), while the diatopic differentiation is left largely implicit (but cf. the expansion of the empire). Terminologically, Isidore uses the relatively unmarked noun *lingua* in order to denote the successive historical varieties of Latin. This unspecified terminology raises the question as to whether and to what extent Isidore might have conceived of the four successive diachronic varieties as independent ‘languages’. It can also be pointed out that although the diachronic criterion is crucial for this classification, there is a general vagueness to the precise historical periods covered by the successive varieties.⁴ For each period, Isidore provides a historical (political) reference,⁵ followed by some prominent literary references. The *prisca* (1) is politically connected to Janus and Saturn, and literarily to the songs of the Salian priests; the *Latina* (2) is politically linked to Latinus and the kings, and literarily to the Law of the Twelve Tables; the *Romana* (3) is politically connected to the Roman republic ('after the kings were driven out') and literarily to Naevius, Plautus, Vergil (poetry), and Gracchus, Cato, and Cicero (prose); lastly, the *mixta* (4) is connected politically to the Roman empire, but lacks literary references. It is important to note that the term *mixta*, by which he designates the fourth period of the Latin language, also occurs in the classification of Greek, as a synonym for *coenedo* (Wright 1982: 93; Banniard 1992a: 241). Müller (2004: 210) suggests that Isidore might be the ‘inventor’ of the term *mixta*, whereas *prisca*, *Latina*, and *Romana* were already circulating before him.

It is important to point out that the *Romana* and the *Latina* are described in a neutral way, without any value judgments, and seem to be presented as

4 In a different connection, Fontaine (1959: 612) notes that ‘Ce phénomène d’‘écrasement des temps’ accuse l’affaiblissement du sens historique chez Isidore’.

5 Cf. Borst (1958: 450), who calls the classification ‘bemerkenswert durch die enge Verbindung von Sprachentwicklung und politischer Situation’.

the unmarked ‘standard varieties’ of the Latin language (Amsler 1993a, 1993b). Accordingly, both of these diachronic varieties might be regarded as the apogee on a historical curve representing the history of the Latin language. Confirmation for this interpretation can be found in *Etym.* 2.16.2, where Isidore indicates correct Latin speech by the phrase *Latine loqui*. Within the same visual representation, the *prisca* and the *mixta* can be imagined as, respectively, the ‘rising’ and the ‘falling’ varieties of the Latin language (Müller 2004: 209). Accordingly, it is interesting to see that by contrast to the *Romana* and the *Latina*, the *prisca* and the *mixta* are explicitly qualified by negative value judgments. The *prisca*, on the one hand, is characterized as *incondita*, ‘rude’ or ‘uncouth’, while the *mixta*, on the other hand, is qualified by the verb forms *irrupit* and *corrumpens*; moreover, it is opposed to the *integritas uerbi* and associated with solecisms and barbarisms (Flobert 1988).⁶ The idea of corruption is very prominent here, and it appears to be central to Isidore’s notion of linguistic change generally.

Isidore’s discussion of the *mixta* deserves some further discussion. First, it is important to note that Isidore conceives of the linguistic change he observes among contemporary speakers of Latin as ‘corruption’ (possibly ‘interference’). This is a phenomenon well known to sociolinguists, and Isidore’s comments on the *mixta* have been duly discussed from this perspective by Amsler (1993a: 287; 1993b: 58–59). It is probably also significant that Isidore does not connect any literary authorities to the *mixta* variety. Second, it is worthy of note that Isidore presents linguistic ‘corruption’ as a consequence of external, foreign influences (*irrupit*).⁷ Thirdly, these external influences are directly connected to the demographic changes (perceivedly) occurring during the (further undefined) period between the end of the Roman republic and Isidore’s own time. Isidore refers to the territorial expansion of the Roman empire giving rise to the immigration / assimilation of foreign nations (*post imperium latius promotum*). When describing the foreign influences introduced by this assimilation, Isidore shows himself an exponent of a long-standing perceived connection between *lingua* and *mores* (cf. *simul cum moribus*) (cf. e.g. Müller 2003: 213–214; Van Hal 2013a).

6 The explanation given by Müller (2004: 209) seems too speculative and too drastic to me: ‘Das Vierstadienmodell des Sevillaners geht vom Sprachwandel als einem seit Babel feststehenden göttlichen Verlaufsplan aus, in den der Mensch nicht eingreifen kann.’

7 Both Reydellet (1984: 37 n. 13) and Müller (2003: 216) connect Isidore’s discussion of the *mixta* to Cicero’s exposition in *Brutus* 74.258: *Confluxerunt enim et Athenas et in hanc urbem multi inquinare loquentes ex diuersis locis.*

In addition, the ‘corrupted’ character of the *mixta* is described by means of the traditional grammatical terms *soloecismus* and *barbarismus*. Isidore’s usage of these terms in this context gains emphasis when connected to the definitions Isidore provides elsewhere for both terms. At 1.32.1 he states that *barbarismus* is named so from the barbarian nations, ‘as long as (*dum*) they were ignorant of the integrity of the Latin language (*Latinae orationis integritatem*)’⁸—compare Isidore’s characterization of the *mixta*, where ‘corruption’ is opposed to *integritas uerbi*. He continues by stating that ‘every nation that had been made Roman brought to Rome with its wealth also its mistakes in words and morals (*uitia quoque et uerborum et morum*)’—this passage, too, obliquely indicates a connection between *lingua* and *mores*. At 1.33.2 Isidore notes that *soloecismus* is called so from the Cilicians, who having left their home town Soloe, dwelt among other nations and ‘mixed up (*confunderent*) their own and other languages incorrectly and incongruously (*uitiose inconsequenterque*)’.⁹ Although *barbarismus* and *soloecismus* are used in ancient grammaticography in order to designate errors made *within* the Latin language, not or not necessarily to be ascribed to ‘external’ influences, the etymologies proposed for both terms unambiguously refer to external influences as the causes for linguistic ‘corruption’. The processes of ‘interference’ (Juhász 1970; Dubuisson 1992; cf. Müller 2003: 215–216) described in both etymologies are directly connected to demographic changes, that is, most prominently, (im)migration.

2 Language Selections

Some authors propose a selection of languages allegedly excelling above the other languages of the world. In most cases, such a ‘premier league’ is based on the notion that Hebrew is the primeval language (Sect. 2.2, p. 60f.) and on the trilingual inscription on Christ’s cross. However, this biblical foundation is often complemented with aesthetic, political, or sociocultural arguments. The threefold selection consisting of Hebrew, Greek and Latin became very popular in Latin Christianity, but was nearly absent from the Greek Christian tradition, occurring only in John Chrysostom, *Homiliae in Ioannem* 85 (PG 59: 460), and Cyril of Alexandria, *In Ioannis euangelium* 12.19.20 (PG 74: 656) (Resnick 1990:

⁸ Fontaine (1959: 127) points out that by using *dum*, Isidore for political and ideological reasons dissociates the contemporary Visigoths—who in fact also use a local variety of Latin—from the ‘barbarians’ which he writes are unacquainted with the purity of Latin.

⁹ The source for Isidore’s discussion of *soloecismus* is Audax / Marius Victorinus (*dubium*), *De soloecismo et barbarismo fragmentum* (Niedermann 1937: 32).

61). One could suggest that the lack of popularity of this notion among Greek Christian authors is due exactly to the prominence this threefold selection gives to Latin, a language which authors such as Basil of Caesarea and Gregory of Nazianzus did not regard very highly (Van Rooy 2013: 41 n. 36; cf. below, p. 248).

Hilary, Jerome, Augustine: A Threefold Selection

As has repeatedly been observed in scholarly literature,¹⁰ Hilary of Poitiers' *Tractatus super Psalmos* instr. 14–15 provides the oldest (preserved) evidence in Latin Christianity for the threefold selection of Hebrew, Greek and Latin. Hilary argues that if Latin, with its 23 characters, is 'caught in the middle' between Hebrew (22 letters) and Greek (24) (Sect. 10.3, p. 37of.), this is so 'because it is primarily in these three languages (*his maxime tribus linguis*) that the sacrament of God's will and the expectation of the blessed reign are preached'. It is for the same reason, he furthermore argues, that the inscription on Christ's cross was composed in these three languages. On the basis of the middle position of Latin between Hebrew and Greek, Hilary states that 'it is especially in the Roman empire, in which Hebrews and Greeks are included (*sub quo Hebraei et Graeci continentur*), that evangelical doctrine stands'. He thus seems to develop an internal hierarchy among these three languages and to give the actual primacy to Latin. Some decades later, Jerome in *Commentarii in Isaiam* 11.40.9/11 refers to the 'three principal languages (*tribus principalibus linguis*)', in which the superscription of the passion of the Lord was written.¹¹ The formula *tribus principalibus linguis* is thus Jerome's, not Augustine's, in whose works it does not occur—pace Borst (1958: 454) and Resnick (1990: 65 n. 86, 66).

Augustine repeatedly mentions the trilingual inscription on Christ's cross, but does not always connect this to the supremacy of Hebrew, Greek and Latin (e.g. *Enarrationes in Psalmos* 55.2, 57.3; cf. Hübner 2004–2010a: 993). On various other occasions, however, Augustine does refer to the inscription on Christ's cross in order to develop a selection consisting of these three languages. In *Enarrationes in Psalmos* 58.1.1 Augustine writes that the inscription on Christ's cross was composed in these three languages, 'which excel by far all over the world (*toto orbe maxime excellunt*)'. He is more specific in *In Iohannis euangelium tractatus* 117.4, where he argues that the inscription was composed in Hebrew, Greek and Latin because 'these three languages there stood

¹⁰ Namely by Borst (1958: 378–379), Berschin (1980: 51), Resnick (1990: 64 with n. 78), and Hille-Coates (2000b: 208–209).

¹¹ Cf. *Ep. 60.4.2: Taceo de Hebreis, Graecis et Latinis, quas nationes fidei suae in crucis titulo Dominus dedicauit.*

out in comparison with the other languages (*prae ceteris eminebant*): Augustine moves on by connecting the supremacy of these three languages to the sociocultural and political circumstances prevailing at the time and place of Christ's crucifixion. The status of Hebrew is based on religious grounds, since it is the language of Judaism (*propter Iudeos in Dei lege gloriantes*),¹² presumably because it constituted a precondition for the 'development' of Christianity; the status of Greek is based on cultural grounds, since it is the language of pagan philosophy (*propter gentium sapientes*); and the status of Latin is based on political grounds, since already in Christ's days it was the nearly universal language of the Roman empire (*propter Romanos multis ac pene omnibus iam tunc gentibus imperantes*) (cf. Hille-Coates 2000a: 140–141).

Augustine elaborates on the same theme in a slightly different way in *Sermo* 218 auct. 6. He there interprets the fact that the inscription was composed in Hebrew, Greek and Latin as an announcement of Christ's kingship not only over the Jews, but also over the (other) nations. He connects this interpretation to the reference to the holy mountain Sion in Ps. 2:6 and to God's promise to 'give you the Gentiles for your inheritance and the utmost parts of the earth for your possession' in Ps. 2:8. On the mountain Sion, he argues, 'the Hebrew language ruled (*regnauit*), immediately subordinating (*continuo ... subiungens*) Greek and Latin, so to speak'. This shows that in Augustine's opinion, the Hebrew language holds primacy over Latin and Greek. In what follows, Augustine argues that Christ in the inscription was called not 'king of the nations' but only 'king of the Jews', in order to indicate his origin. However, he states that the use of the three languages announces the universality of Christianity. The supremacy of Greek and Latin immediately after Hebrew is subsequently explained again with reference to sociocultural and political circumstances. Greek and Latin refer to all the nations, Augustine argues, not because there are no other languages among the nations, 'but because these languages excel the most (*maxime excellunt*)—Greek because of its literary production (*studium litterarum*), Latin because of the Roman Empire'.

Quodvultdeus: A Refinement of the Threefold Selection

Quodvultdeus discusses and refines the by his time authoritative threefold selection in *Liber promissionum et praedictorum Dei* 1.9.15. He establishes that the inscription on Christ's cross stands in Hebrew, Greek and Latin, 'the languages which hold supremacy (*primatum ... retinentes*) among about all the

¹² A good point of departure with regard to Augustine's attitude(s) towards the Jews is van Oort (2004–2010b).

languages (*fere in omnibus ... linguis*)'. Quodvultdeus subsequently introduces an internal hierarchy among these three languages, stating that 'that mystic inscription composed by Pilate shows that Hebrew is the foremost language (*primam ... Hebraeam esse linguam*)'. Quodvultdeus thus follows his teacher and friend Augustine in giving primacy to Hebrew against Hilary's preference for Latin. He furthermore takes Pilate's refusal (Ioh. 19:22) to change the trilingual inscription—in which the Hebrew version according to Ioh. 19:20 came first—as evidence for the fact that Hebrew 'once held the principal place (*principalem habuisse locum*) which it lost afterwards (*quem post amisit*)'. In full, the subordinate clause runs as follows: ... *ut et tituli inuiolata, sicut promissum est, maneret integritas et lingua Hebraea sub testimonio principalem habuisse locum quem post amisit merito signaretur*. In my opinion, the adverb *merito* specifies *signaretur* not *amisit*, as Braun (SC 101: 187) seems to assume when he translates 'place qu'elle perdit ensuite par leur faute'. This translation would imply that Hebrew lost its primacy due to the Jews' involvement in Christ's crucifixion. Rather, I believe that for Quodvultdeus, the primacy of Hebrew among the three principal languages is based on its status as the primeval language (Sect. 2.2, p. 83). Accordingly, Hebrew in Quodvultdeus' opinion lost its primacy at Babel, when it was no longer the exclusive language of mankind. This interpretation is corroborated by the fact that the preceding text portions—*Liber promissionum et praedictorum Dei* 1.8.14 and the first sentence of 1.9.15—deal with the status of Hebrew as the primeval language and with the origin of language diversity. In addition, Quodvultdeus' treatment was probably inspired by Augustine's extensive discussions of language history, where Hebrew as the primeval language occupies an important place and which Quodvultdeus must have known thoroughly (Ch. 2, p. 57f., and 3, p. 96f.).

Apponius: A Fivefold Selection

Possibly drawing in part on Jerome's *Commentarii in Isaiam* 7.19.18 (cf. below, p. 242), the elusive 5th or 6th-century exegete named Apponius (cf. König 2002) proposes an exceptional fivefold selection in his *In Canticum canticorum expositione* 89–93 (part of the epilogue). In this allegorical interpretation of Cant. (Song of Songs), Apponius first compares the beloved, which takes on five characters (*quinque personae*) (Cant. 5:1–2)—namely girlfriend, bride, sister, dove, and immaculate—to a body which is one but which has five motions and senses by which it performs all its functions (*uelut unum corpus quinque motibus sensibusque quibus uniuersa opera aguntur*). Subsequently, he connects each of the five characters taken on by the beloved to five languages (*quas quinque personas quinque opinor intellegi linguas*). Within this exegetical context, Apponius posits the primacy not just of Hebrew, Greek and Latin, but

expands this series to Hebrew, Greek, Egyptian, Latin, and Syriac/Assyrian (in this order). This selection appears to be based on biblical grounds writ large, that is to say, with regard both to the content and to the context of the Bible.

According to Apponius' explanation, Hebrew (1) owes its status to the fact that it 'is first/foremost among all languages (*omnium linguarum prima*)'. The most likely interpretation of this concise phrase is that Apponius regards Hebrew as the primeval language (Sect. 2.2, p. 60f.). In addition, Apponius states that it is from the Hebrew-speaking Jewish community that Christianity originated (cf. Augustine) and—according to a mistaken but widespread belief (Resnick 1990: 60)—that the gospel of Matthew was originally written in Hebrew. Furthermore, Greek (2) is said to owe its status to Marc and Luke, who wrote their Gospels in this language. As just mentioned, Apponius believed that the gospel of Matthew was written in Hebrew, but it remains unclear why he does not refer to John here (perhaps Apponius believed that the gospel of John, too, was originally written in Hebrew). Egyptian (possibly Coptic) (3) owes its status to Mark, who, as Apponius writes, is said to have been 'not unskilled' in that language. This statement must be based on the belief (evidenced in Eusebius, *Historia ecclesiastica* 2.16.1, 2.24.1) that Mark travelled to Alexandria and became its first bishop (Livingstone 1997: 1038). With regard to Latin (4), Apponius notes that the ancients called this language 'Auxonian' (*Auxonia*) after king 'Auxonus' ('Ausonus'; cf. e.g. Servius' commentary on Vergil's *Aeneid* 3.477). He furthermore connects the status of Latin to the authority of Peter, presumably because of his position as the first bishop of Rome. Lastly, Assyrian (5) or Syriac (*Assyria, id est Syra*) owes its status to the Assyrian captivity of Israel.

In the remainder of his allegorical interpretation, Apponius harks back to the analogy between the five characters of the beloved and the five senses of the body. He elaborates on this analogy by stating that the five languages, symbolized by the five characters of the beloved in Cant., together constitute 'the body of Christ'—according to Paul's image for the Church (1 Cor. 12:27). He concludes that 'whatever other languages there are under the sky, these are converted to Christ and inserted in these [five] languages as the members in a body'. This is presumably another case where a linguistic selection is interpreted as a symbol for all the world's languages and, as such, for the (future or growing) spiritual unity of Christianity. Indeed, Apponius in a last move involves Is. 19:18a in his exegesis: 'There will be in that day five (!) cities in the land of Egypt that speak in the language of Canaan, and one will be called the city of the sun' (*erunt ... in die illa ... quinque ciuitates in terra Aegypti loquentes lingua Chanaan, et ciuitas Solis uocabitur una*). He explains that Egypt stands for the world before the incarnation of Christ, whereas the 'city of the sun' amounts to the Hebrew language, which in turn signifies the spiritual unity of the heavenly Jerusalem.

It is probably safe to conclude that Apponius implicitly takes the threefold selection (which he knew presumably through Jerome and/or Augustine) as his point of departure, but raises the number of ‘principal’ languages to five, because of the exegetical context for his exposition, namely the connection between the five characters of the beloved in Cant., and the five cities in Is. 19:18a. Moreover, like Hilary and Augustine, Apponius presents his linguistic selection as an announcement of the universal spread of Christianity.

Isidore: The Codification and ‘Consecration’ of the Threefold Selection

Innovative as Apponius’ fivefold selection was, it exerted no traceable impact in Christian Latin thought. Isidore of Seville in *Etym.* 9.1.3 harks back to, and perpetuates the traditional selection of Hebrew, Greek and Latin, with reference to the ‘excellence’ of these languages over the entire world, to the trilingual inscription on Christ’s cross, and—remarkably—to the necessity of knowing these languages in view of a sound biblical exegesis (Sect. 5. Interlude, p. 182). Although Isidore’s statement consists of material from Augustine’s *Enarrationes in Psalmos* 58.1.1 and *De doctrina Christiana* 2.11.16 (Reydellet 1984: 33), it has long been noticed that Isidore is the first author to designate Hebrew, Greek, and Latin not simply as the ‘three principal languages’, but as the ‘three sacred languages’ (*tres ... linguae sacrae*).¹³ The joint primacy of these three languages—Isidore does not introduce an internal hierarchy—is thus confirmed primarily by ‘religious’ (biblical and exegetical) arguments, not by political or sociocultural ones.¹⁴ As is clear from the investigations carried out by Schwering (1925), Borst (1957–1963), McNally (1958), Resnick (1990), and Hille-Coates (2000b, 2002), Isidore’s ‘consecrated’ threefold selection of Hebrew, Greek and Latin was to exert major impact on medieval and early modern thought on language.

3 Language Affinity

In order to come to grips with language diversity, some authors try to chart affinity between languages. Within a biblical framework, this affinity should

¹³ Among others by Borst (1958: 454), Berschin (1980: 32, 120–121), Resnick (1990: 65), Hille-Coates (2000b: 207–210), Müller (2004: 220; 2005: 22; 2006: 495), and Hilhorst (2007: 782–784); also cf. Merrills (2013: 303–304).

¹⁴ Cf. Isidore’s *Liber numerorum* 4.17 (book 4 is entirely devoted to everything relating to the number 3): *Sacrae legis lingua triplex est, Hebraea, Graeca et Latina* (cf. Hille-Coates 2000b: 209).

evidently be understood as cases of ‘special’ or ‘more intimate’ affinity, given the fact that all languages ultimately derive from the Hebrew ‘protolanguage’ and, in this way, all connect to each other.

Remarks on language affinity are almost nonexistent in Christian Latin literature prior to Jerome. Ambrosiaster in *Quaestiones ueteris et noui testamenti* 108.7 investigates the value of an opinion which could be termed the ‘reconstruction hypothesis’, according to which the Hebrew language of his days would be the same language as the primeval language, reconstructed out of the latter’s remnants which had been scattered over the various post-Babelic languages (Denecker 2014a: 10). While pondering this possibility, Ambrosiaster makes an interesting observation with regard to linguistic affinity. He argues that the Hebrew language of his days must either be the primeval language restituted by God to Abraham, or else must be the primeval language reconstructed out of many, ‘for we see that not a few languages bear similarities to it (*aliquantas linguas similia eius habere*)’. Ambrosiaster does not enter into more detail, but the remark without doubt deals with the perceived similarities between Hebrew and other ‘Semitic’ languages.

A similar argument, combined with a reference to the similarities between Hebrew and other languages (Syriac), also occurs in the 8th-century Syriac ‘Diyarbakir manuscript’, which is possibly a translation of a Greek text by Theodore of Mopsuestia (c.350–428) (Van Rompay 1986: 88–89; Moss 2010: 131–132; Denecker 2014a: 14–15 n. 48). Accordingly, it can be hypothesized that this particular observation by Ambrosiaster together with the ‘reconstruction hypothesis’—which he does not accept—more generally, is part of an intricate and largely lost complex of linguistic ideas ultimately going back to the Hellenistic-Jewish book of Jubilees (Denecker 2014a: 16; cf. Eskhult 2013: 102; Van Rooy 2013: 27; Eskhult 2014: 318 n. 110).

Jerome: The Hebrew ‘Protolanguage’ and Its Affinities to Other ‘Semitic’ Languages

Jerome was undoubtedly a keen observer of linguistic variation. In the preface to *Commentarii in epistulas Paulinas* Gal. 2 (CCSL 77A: 83) he notes that it is not surprising that the Galatians have slightly altered the Gaulish (‘Trierisch’) language of their ancestors (cf. below, p. 243f.), ‘since the Latin language itself (*ipsa Latinitas*) varies every day (*quotidie mutetur*) according to region as well as to time (*et regionibus ... et tempore*)’.¹⁵ Somewhat more concisely, he argues in *Quaestiones Hebraicae in Genesim* 21.14 that ‘we should not be surprised that a

¹⁵ On the term and concept of *Latinitas*, involving notions of ‘norm’ and ‘correctness’, cf. the

barbarian language has its own characteristics (*proprietates suas*), since nowadays in Rome too (*hodieque Romae*), all sons (*filiū*) are called ‘infants’ (*infantes*). The case of semantic shift quoted by Jerome (*infantes* taking the place of *filiū*) implies that the usage of Latin varies along time and place (diachronically and diatopically). An astute observation on linguistic variation also occurs in *Commentarii in euangelium Matthaei* 4.26.73, where Jerome comments on the apostle Peter’s third denial, after having betrayed himself by his Galilean accent (Matth. 26:73–75). Jerome points out that this does not mean that Peter spoke a different language or was a foreigner, since all the people figuring in the narrative were ‘Hebrews’. Rather, he states that Peter betrayed himself due to the fact that ‘every single province and region had its own characteristics (*proprietates suas*)’ and that consequently, Peter ‘was not able to hide his native accent when speaking (*ueraculum loquendi sonum*)’. These comments deal with intralingual variation and accordingly will not be discussed in further detail, but they provide a lively illustration of Jerome’s awareness that no language is a static entity. From a biographical or anecdotal point of view, one could suggest that this awareness was enhanced by Jerome’s frequent journeys and his versatile linguistic competences.

Equipped with this gift of observation, Jerome provides numerous valuable observations on linguistic affinity. From his letters and exegetic works, one can even gather elements for a genealogical framework of linguistic diversity, disparate as it remains in the end. Foundational for this framework is the fact that Jerome regards Hebrew not just as the primeval language (Sect. 2.2, p. 74f.), but also as the genealogical ‘protolanguage’, that is, as the language from which all other languages derive. In *Ep. 18A.6.7* he calls Hebrew ‘the beginning of speech and of general conversation and all that we say’, and in *Commentarii in prophetas minores* Soph. 3.14/18 (with regard to *nugae*), ‘the mother of all languages’ (*omnium linguarum ... matricem*). Jerome’s (and Isidore’s) choice to indicate Hebrew as the ‘mother of all languages’ may have given a strong impulse to the use of biological terminology in later linguistic description (Percival 1987a). Among the languages nowadays known as ‘Semitic’—I maintain this anachronistic term in order to systematize Jerome’s statements—Jerome posits a reasonably wide variety of relationships. The precise nature of these relationships is, unfortunately, less than clear, due to Jerome’s terminological vagueness. The term *uicinus*, for instance, which is often used by Jerome, may mean both ‘neighbouring’ and ‘kindred’, thus ranging from mere geographic

studies by Smiley (1906), Díaz y Díaz (1951), Versteegh (1987), Desbordes (1991), and Morin (1998).

proximity, over resemblance, to genealogical relationship (cf. Auroux 1990: 220). In most cases, however, we can safely assume that when *uicinus* and other terms literally denoting geographic proximity are used, they do imply actual linguistic kinship, most importantly on grounds of the belief that all languages ultimately derive from Hebrew. I will maintain the equally vague terms ‘close’ and ‘closeness’ when translating these terms of proximity, but I will try to define their meaning more precisely in my interpretations.

Jerome’s terminological vagueness is clearly applicable to a first case of linguistic affinity on which he comments, namely between Hebrew and Syriac. In *Commentarii in epistulas Paulinas* Gal. 1.2.11–13 (CCSL 77A: 56), Jerome writes that a rock is called *cephan* both by Hebrews and by Syrians, ‘because of the linguistic closeness between them’ (*propter linguæ inter se uiciniam*). The affinity between Hebrew and Syriac is also implied in *Ep. 26.4*, where Jerome writes that the phrase *Maran atha* ‘is Syriac rather than Hebrew, although it also resounds something Hebrew, coming as it does from the borderland of both languages (*ex confinio utrarumque linguarum*)’. Apart from a more intimate (more ancient?) genealogical relation between Hebrew and Syriac, Jerome might be thinking of a secondary (mutual?) structural and lexico-semantic influence due to geographic proximity, comparable to what we know as the *Sprachbund* effect (Becker 1948).

Second, Jerome also comments on the affinity between Hebrew and ‘Chaldean’, which is presumably to be identified as biblical Aramaic.¹⁶ In the preface to his translation of Tobit—which was probably originally written in Aramaic (Moore in *ABD* 6: 590–591)—he writes that ‘the language of the Chaldeans is close (*uicina*) to the Hebrew tongue’ (cf. Adams 2003: 269). However, Jerome does not go so far as to subscribe to the opinion that Hebrew and ‘Chaldean’/Aramaic are one and the same language. A passage in the book of Daniel (1:4) describes how king Asphenaz commands ‘to bring him boys ... in order that he might teach them the letters and language of the Chaldeans’. Jerome refers to the Hellenistic-Jewish exegete Philo of Alexandria (c.25 BC–c.50 AD), who had apparently commented on this pericope—in a passage which is now lost—that Chaldean and Hebrew were one and the same language. In *Commentarii in Danielem* 1.1.4a–c Jerome rebuts this point of view as follows:

¹⁶ Hilhorst (2007: 779–780), King (2009: 216), Beattie & Davies (2011), and Gallagher (2012: 123–131 [126–128]) explain the terminological issues in this connection. Barr (1966: 287) states that ‘Jerome had some knowledge of the vocabulary of some kind of Aramaic, whether the Jewish Aramaic which used to be called Chaldee (and is so called sometimes by Jerome) and is now called simply Aramaic [the biblical Aramaic of Daniel and Tobit], or the Christian dialect which is usually called Syriac.’

'if we accept this, we are to ask ourselves how it is possible that Hebrew boys are now ordered to be taught a language which they already know'. Jerome also deals with the affinity between Hebrew and 'Chaldean'/Aramaic in the preface to his translation of Kings. In order to understand Jerome's comment, it is important to know that a 'Chaldean'/Aramaic alphabet was used to put Syriac (the Christian dialect) to writing. The fact that the Hebrew alphabet counts 22 characters, Jerome points out, 'is also shown by the language of the Syrians and the Chaldeans, which is very close (*magna ex parte confinis*) to Hebrew'. It is remarkable that the writing system (Sect. 10.4, p. 378) is used as a criterion in establishing linguistic affinity. The questions of interpretation involved by the term *confinis*—literally: 'bordering on'—are nearly identical to those raised by *uicinus*, and can be answered in the same way (cf. above, p. 239 f.).

Thirdly, Jerome comments quite extensively on the affinity between Hebrew and Punic (cf. Eskhult 2014: 338). In *Quaestiones Hebraicae in Genesim* 36.24 he mentions the possibility that the Hebrew word *maria* would mean 'hot waters', because that is what it means in Punic. This lexico-semantic correspondence is motivated 'through the proximity (*uiciniam*) with the Punic language, which is close (*contermina*) to Hebrew'—here again, *conterminus* literally means 'neighbouring, bordering upon', but the possibility of geographic proximity can be excluded in this specific case. In *In Hieremiam prophetam libri sex* 5.19 Jerome seems to suggest that Punic genealogically derives from Hebrew through the intermediary of Phoenician. He writes that Carthage is a colony of the Phoenician cities of Tyrus and Sidon, and that hence, the inhabitants of Carthage are called Punics, or *Poeni*, with a corrupted form (*sermone corrupto*) of *Phoeni*. He furthermore argues that their Punic language 'is very close (*magna ex parte confinis*) to the Hebrew language'.

Jerome is more explicit on the intermediary genealogical relation between Punic and Phoenician in the preface to *Commentarii in epistulas Paulinas Gal. 2* (CCSL 77A: 83), where he argues that 'the Africans have altered (*mutauerint*) the language of the Phoenicians to a considerable extent (*nonnulla ex parte*)'. Lastly, in *Commentarii in Isaiam* 3.7.14 he explicitly states the genealogical relation between Punic and Hebrew. Having defined the Hebrew word *alma* as 'a virgin, covered and hidden, who has never been exposed to the eyes of men, but who has been protected by the great care of her parents', he notes that in Punic, too, a virgin is properly called *alma* (Sect. 9.3, p. 327 f.). This information derives its relevance from the fact that Punic 'is said to spring from the wells of the Hebrews' (*quae de Hebraeorum fontibus manare dicitur*). This metaphor clearly indicates a genealogical relation and—in the light of Jerome's view that all languages derive from Hebrew—probably suggests a more intimate or more ancient relationship between Punic and Hebrew.

Fourth and last, Jerome in *Commentarii in Isaiam* 7.19.18 comments on the affinity between ‘Egyptian’, Hebrew, and a language named ‘Canaanite’.¹⁷ It is important to note that Jerome’s linguistic comment is strongly determined by the exegesis of Is. 19:18a in which it is inserted: ‘There will be on that day five cities in the land of Egypt that speak in the language of Canaan’ (*erunt in die illa quinque ciuitates in terra Aegypti loquentes lingua Chanaan*). Jerome seems to interpret this passage on an anagogical line of exegesis, that is, with reference to the afterlife (cf. Introduction, p. 6). Within this particular interpretation—and unlike in other contexts—the ‘Egyptian’ language symbolizes the sinful existence of those outside the Church, ‘Canaanite’ the existence of Christians on earth, and Hebrew the Christians’ afterlife (cf. Hebrew as the ‘eschatological language’, p. 75f.). In developing this line of exegesis, Jerome employs the terminology he elsewhere uses to describe linguistic affinity, but this time he distorts his linguistic observation in service of his exegetic point. He argues that in the present circumstances

we are bound to speak not Hebrew but Canaanite, a language which holds the middle between Egyptian and Hebrew (*quae inter Aegyptiam et Hebraeam media est*), and which is very close (*magna ex parte confinis*) to Hebrew.

Canaanite thus represents the life of Christians on earth, which is still a temporary and less than perfect condition but which is already closer to the afterlife than those outside the Church will ever come.

With reference to the same Bible verse, Jerome in *Commentarii in Isaiam* 5.19.18 mentions two Egyptian cities, Rhinocorura and Casium, and writes that ‘it is obvious that up until today, these cities speak the Canaanite language, that is, Syriac (*lingua Chananitide, hoc est, Syra*)’. It looks as though in this passage of his commentary on Isaiah—unlike at 7.19.18—Jerome actually tries to elucidate the Bible verse with reference to linguistic reality. Nevertheless, this is a short and obscure phrase, and in my opinion the following explanation, proposed by Krauss (1893–1894: 48–49) remains the best one possible. Noting

¹⁷ The relevant portion of Jerome’s exposition reads as follows: *Didicimus quanta bona tribuat eleuata manus Domini; quaeramus quare non lingua Hebraea, sed lingua Chananitide loquantur quinque Aegypti ciuitates. Ad quod ita respondere conabimur: Hebreus περάτην, id est transitorem, sonat, qui de loco transit ad locum. Ergo et nos licet sancti quandiu in Aegypto sumus, et in istius mundi uersamur tenebris, non possumus loqui lingua Hebraea, sed lingua Chananitide, quae inter Aegyptiam et Hebraeam media est, et Hebraeae magna ex parte confinis.* On the historical Canaanites, cf. Uehlinger (1999–2000).

elsewhere that *Kam* (Ham) in Egyptian means ‘Egypt’ (*Quaestiones Hebraicae in Genesim* 9.18), Jerome knows from Gen. 10:6 that Chanaan was the son of Ham, one of the three Noachides. According to Krauss, Jerome concludes from this that ‘Canaanite’ was the old language of Egypt (Ham). On the basis of *Ep.* 108.14 to Eustochium, Krauss furthermore suggests that Jerome during his journeys visited—or believed to have visited—those five cities from Is. 19:18a where old Egyptian, ‘Canaanite’, was spoken. Still according to Krauss, Jerome must have recognized Semitic elements in this language further unknown to him, and was thus able to call it ‘Syriac’, a language of which he had only a shaky command (cf. King 2009) but which he knew was related to Hebrew (cf. above, p. 240). Despite the distortion of Jerome’s comments due to the exegetical context in which they are formulated, it seems justified to conclude that Jerome vaguely conceived of ‘Egyptian’ and—if different—‘Canaanite’ as languages with a special affinity to Hebrew.

Jerome: Affinity among ‘Non-Semitic’ Languages

Jerome also comments on cases of linguistic affinity falling outside the range of ‘Semitic’ languages. In the preface to *Commentarii in epistulas Paulinas* Gal. 2 (CCSL 77A: 83) he discusses the affinity between Galatian and the ‘Gaulish’ language or dialect spoken in the region of Trier. We know that Galatian was a Celtic language spoken in Asia Minor (North-Central Anatolia), which was introduced there after the Celtic invasion of Greece (279/278 BC) and which became established by 260 BC (Koch 2006: 788). There is a real possibility that Jerome visited both Trier and Galatia—as he claims to have done in *Ep.* 3.5.2 and 5.2.3 (Trier) and in *Ep.* 3.3 (Galatia)—and was thus able to draw on his own linguistic findings.¹⁸ However, it has been suggested by Krappe (1929: 129) that Jerome’s comment actually derives from the Greek polymath Posidonius (c.135–c.51BC) by way of Varro’s *Antiquitates* and thus has only limited documentary value (cf. Weisgerber 1931: 167). Likewise, Kelly (1975: 25–26) suspects that Jerome in this passage quotes from the lost four books of the *Epistulae ad Probum* by Lactantius, ‘who had lectured first at Nicomedia, close to Galatian territory’, but was summoned to Trier by Constantine the Great around 314. Lactantius’ information would then also go back to Posidonius by way of Varro. By contrast, still according to Kelly, Jerome’s stay at Trier would have been too short to ‘dabble in comparative philology’.

18 Lammert (1918: 409) does not question Jerome’s stay in Trier/Gaul; Kelly (1975: 25–26) emphasizes that the ‘actual evidence for his sojourn at Trier is ... less free from ambiguity, than we could wish’, although he states that we remain with the impression ‘that Jerome had some knowledge of the speech of the Treveri’.

Meißner (2009–2010: 107), however, taking the language of the Treveri to be Gaulish, argues on the ground of onomastic evidence that Gaulish survived in Trier until the end of the 4th, or until the beginning of the 5th century AD. In his opinion, this confirms 'both the genuineness and the accuracy' of Jerome's statement. Regardless of the question of the sources, Jerome's comment is our only preserved literary testimony for this linguistic reality. Jerome describes the linguistic situation in Galatia as one of diglossia (Ferguson 1959). Next to Greek, the presumable high-prestige variety which is used by the entire Orient (*quo omnis Oriens loquitur*) (cf. Millar 2010: 71), the Galatians are said to use a language 'of their own' (*propria lingua*), which is presumably a less prestigious variety. This description is refined by means of the comment that 'Galatian' is 'almost the same language as the inhabitants of Trier have', although the Galatians 'have corrupted (*corruperint*) some aspects' of 'Trierisch'. Apart from strong resemblance, Jerome thus perceives a genealogical relation (cf. *exinde*) between Trierisch and Galatian (Freeman 2001). It should be pointed out that linguistic change is here again described in terms of 'corruption' (cf. above, p. 231f., on Isidore).

At Gal. 1.11–12 in the same commentary (CCSL 77A: 27), Jerome comments on the affinity between Latin and Greek. The passage stems from a context where Jerome is defending himself against critics of the allegedly 'novel and vile style' of his commentary. In defence, he calls upon the practice of Cicero, who found himself compelled to coin 'abstruse' neologisms when translating or transferring Greek philosophy into Latin. Jerome argues that this is all the more true of his own practice, for whereas Greek is 'close' (*uicina*) to Latin,¹⁹ the increased distance between Hebrew and Latin makes it harder to turn Hebrew words and meanings into Latin. Jerome's remark is of course passing and general, but the intimate affinity between Latin and Greek which he posits may well be an echo of the so-called 'Aeolic hypothesis', according to which Latin originated as a Greek (Aeolic) dialect (Sect. 9.3, p. 334f.). This hypothesis was elaborated by several Greek grammarians active in Rome but most importantly by Dionysius of Halicarnassus (c.60–p.7 BC) in his *Antiquitates Romanae* (Gabba 1963; Dubuisson 1984; Werner 1992: 16–17; Rochette 1997a: 336–337, 1997b: 50–51; Stevens 2006–2007). The notion is also prominent in Varro's *De lingua Latina* (Sect. 9.3, p. 334f.), and reference can furthermore be made to Macrobius, who at the outset of his *De differentiis et societatibus Graeci Latinique uerbi* states that 'nature gave a very narrow affinity to the Greek

¹⁹ Likewise, Tertullian in his *De testimonio animae* 6.3 refers in passing to Latin and Greek, 'which are considered close to each other (*propinquae inter se*)'.

and the Latin language' (*Graecae Latinaeque linguae coniunctissimam cognitionem natura dedit*) (*KGL* 5: 599). However, the vague terminology used by Jerome does not compellingly indicate a genealogical relation between Latin and Greek. In this case, too, the 'proximity' between both languages may consist of a geographic, a genealogical and/or a 'structural' component and thus come close to what we know as the *Sprachbund* effect (cf. above, p. 240).

Augustine: Affinity among the 'Semitic' Languages

Like Jerome—and presumably drawing in part on his works—Augustine frequently comments on the affinity between languages nowadays known as 'Semitic'. Nevertheless, Augustine is often appreciably independent with regard to Jerome, and for this reason I discuss his comments separately.²⁰ Augustine nowhere explicitly indicates Hebrew as the genealogical protolanguage, but it seems safe to infer from his expositions on language history (Ch. 2, p. 57f., and 3, p. 96f.) that this was a self-evident notion to him. Augustine comments on the affinity between Hebrew and Syriac in *De Genesi ad litteram libri duodecim* 1.18.36, where he may draw on a passage in Ambrose's *Exameron* or—more probably, according to Altaner (1967c [1940]: 439–443; 1967a [1950]: 270)—on Eustathius' Latin translation of Basil of Caesarea's *Homiliae in Hexaameron*.²¹ He argues that *superferebatur* in Gen. 1:2, used with reference to the Spirit of God, should not be understood as 'was carried over'—the literal meaning of Latin *superferebatur*—but rather as *fouebat*, 'fostered'. He specifies that this interpretation corresponds 'to the meaning of the Syriac language, which is close (*uicina*) to Hebrew'.

²⁰ Some of the relevant comments made by Augustine are also discussed by Eskhult (2014: 337–338).

²¹ Augustine's exposition reads as follows: *Nam et illud, quod per Graecam et Latinam linguam dictum est de spiritu Dei, quod superferebatur super aquas, secundum Syrae linguae intellectum, quae uicina est Hebraeae—nam hoc a quodam docto Christiano Syro fertur expositum—non superferebatur, sed fouebat potius intellegi perhibetur*. Cf. Ambrose, *Exameron* 1.8.29: *Denique Syrus, qui uicinus Hebraeo est et sermone consonat in plerisque et congruit, sic habet: Et spiritus Dei fouebat aquas, id est uiuificabat, ut in nouas cogeret creaturas et fotu suo animaret ad uitam*. And cf. Basil of Caesarea, *Homiliae in Hexaameron* 2.6, who writes on the authority of an unspecified Syrian informant: Πῶς οὖν ἐπεφέρετο τοῦτο ἐπάνω τοῦ ὄδατος; Ἐρῶ σοι οὐκ ἔμαυτοῦ λόγον, ἀλλὰ Σύρου ἀνδρὸς σοφίας κοσμικῆς τοσοῦτον ἀφεστηκότος, ὃσον ἐγγὺς ἦν τῆς τῶν ἀληθινῶν ἐπιστήμης. "Ἐλεγε τοίνυν τὴν τῶν Σύρων φωνὴν ἐμφατικωτέραν τε εἶναι, καὶ διὰ τὴν πρόδη τὴν Ἐβραϊδα γειτνίασιν, μᾶλλον πως τῇ ἐννοίᾳ τῶν Γραφῶν προσεγγίζειν (cf. Bussières 2010: 29–30 n. 19). It is possible that Augustine here includes Aramaic in his use of *Hebraeus*, as it is used in Act. 21:40 and 22:2 (cf. Rochette 1998b).

In *In Iohannis euangelium tractatus* 15.27 Augustine states that Latin *unctus*, ‘anointed’, is *christus* in Greek and *messias* in Hebrew. He furthermore states that ‘hence’ (*unde*)—that is, in accordance with Hebrew *messias*—the Punic word *messe* also means ‘anoint’, because Hebrew, Punic, and Syriac are ‘allied’ (*cognatae*) and ‘neighbouring’ (*uicinae*) languages. Likewise, he argues in *Contra litteras Petilianae* 2.104.239 that the Hebrew *messias* is a word that corresponds to (*consonum est*) the Punic language, ‘as is the case with very many and nearly all Hebrew words’. In *Quaestiones in Heptateuchum* 7.16 Augustine notes that among speakers of ‘biblical’ languages, the name *Baal* is used in order to designate the supreme deity (*Jupiter*), and *Astarte* for his wife (*Iuno*). He demonstrates this linguistic fact with reference to Punic, where *Baal* is used for ‘lord’, *Baalsamen* for ‘lord of heaven’ since *samen* means ‘heaven(s)’, and *Astarte* for *Iuno*. Accordingly, Augustine concludes that by ‘Baal and the Astartes’, the Hebrew Bible refers to *Jupiter* and his ‘Iunones’, since Hebrew and Punic ‘do not differ much from each other’ (*non multum inter se differunt*).

Lastly, Augustine comments on the affinity between Hebrew and Punic in *Sermo* 113.2.2, where he is perhaps integrating Jerome’s notes on biblical languages into his own (limited) command of Punic.²² In order to explain the meaning of *mammona iniquitatis* (Matth. 6:24; Luc. 16:13), Augustine first makes it clear that *mammona* is a Hebrew word which is related (*cognatum*) to Punic. Making use of explicit terminology for linguistic kinship, he further argues that Hebrew and Punic ‘are connected to each other (*sibi ... sociantur*) through a certain affinity of meaning (*significationis quadam uicinitate*)’. He concludes by noting that the Punic word *mammon* means ‘gain’, while Hebrew *mammona* means ‘riches’.²³ Adams (2003: 294) presumably thinks of Augustine’s comments when he notes that ‘the Latin Church ... displayed a tolerance of Punic, and that was partly because Punic was known to be related to Hebrew’. However, as I have tried to show in Sect. 4.3 (p. 136f.) and 6.3 (p. 205f.), it is within very clear boundaries that Punic could be tolerated, since according to

²² However, Jerome points out that *mammona* is a Syriac word, while Augustine contends that it is Hebrew; cf. Jerome, *Ep. 22.31.2: Nam gentili Syrorum lingua mammona 'diuitiae' nuncupantur; Commentarii in euangelium Matthaei 1.6.24: Mammona sermone Syriaco diuitiae nuncupantur; Ep. 121.6.13: Iniquus autem mamona non Hebraeorum, sed Syrorum lingua diuitiae nuncupantur, quod de iniquitate collectae sint.*

²³ Augustine discusses the word on two other occasions (*De sermone Domini in monte* 2.14.47; *Sermo* 359A.11), where he does not, however, make a general statement about language affinity (Sect. 9.3, p. 329). Another case of lexical correspondence between Hebrew and Punic is *edom*, ‘blood’, cf. *Enarrationes in Psalmos* 136.18: *Interpretatur autem, quantum dicunt qui illam linguam nouerunt, edom, sanguis; nam et Punice edom, sanguis dicitur.*

Augustine's anti-Donatist rhetoric the preference for Punic is a typical trait of Donatist African particularism.

Isidore

The belief that Hebrew is not only the primeval language but also the genealogical protolanguage is stated by Isidore in *Etym.* 1.3.4, where he argues that the Latin letter *a* derives from the Greek *alpha*, which in turn derives from the Hebrew *aleph* (Sect. 10.2, p. 363f.). Integrating one of Jerome's statements on the issue (cf. above, p. 239), Isidore explains that this derivation was performed by a 'translator' in order for us to know 'that the Hebrew language is the mother of all languages and letters (*omnium linguarum et litterarum ... matrem*)'.

Apart from the language classifications discussed above, which often imply some form of affinity and/or genealogy, comments on linguistic affinity in Isidore's works are scanty and derivative. There is one passage in *Etym.* 9.1.9 where Isidore comments on the affinity between some 'Semitic' languages, while integrating and modifying statements made by Ambrose and by Jerome. In the first half of this passage, Isidore argues that 'Syriac and Chaldean are close (*uicinus*) to Hebrew in language (*in sermone*), agreeing in most respects (*consonans in plerisque*), also in the sound of their letters (*et litterarum sono*)'. This sentence consists of material borrowed from Ambrose's *Exameron* 1.8.29, which in turn relied on Basil of Caesarea's Greek *Homiliae in Hexaemeron* (cf. above, p. 245; Reydellet 1984: 37 n. 15), but while Ambrose aimed at the Bible versions written in Syriac and Hebrew respectively, Isidore turns the sentence into a statement about the affinity of the Syriac, 'Chaldean'/Aramaic, and Hebrew languages in general. In the second part of the passage, Isidore in a slightly modified form integrates Jerome's rebuttal of the idea that Hebrew and 'Chaldean'/Aramaic are one and the same language (cf. above, p. 240f.).

4 Language Comparison and Linguistic Value Judgments

A fourth and last approach consists in comparing different languages to each other in terms of their 'vices' and 'virtues'. More specifically, this means that languages or language varieties are evaluated against each other as 'correct', 'logical', 'beautiful', etc., or in opposite terms. As has been pointed out in the Introduction (p. 8f.), it was due in part to the upsurge of translation practice that early Christian Latin authors became aware of the structural differences between their own and other languages (Marti 1974: 121; Werner 1992: 20). As a consequence, paratexts (prefaces and epilogues) to translations are among our foremost sources for evaluative statements about linguistic differences. It

should be noted that the present section is a slightly heterogeneous one within this chapter, since the authors often focus their linguistic evaluations on an individual feature of one language as compared to another. Whereas much of the relevant material has been discussed by Marti (1974) from the perspective of translation studies, I will reconsider these passages for the linguistic value judgments they contain. A particularly popular theme is the alleged lexicosemantic poverty of the target language—as a rule the translators' mother tongue, Latin in this case—when compared to the source language—Greek or Hebrew. This theme is evidently inherited from 'classical' authors such as, most famously, Lucretius (Bartelink 1976a; Schöpsdau 1992; Fögen 2000; Müller-Wetzel 2000).²⁴

As I have argued extensively elsewhere (Denecker 2015a), the authors' linguistic value judgments can often be explained with reference to what in sociolinguistics is called the 'social connotations hypothesis'. This hypothesis involves that evaluative statements about languages are biased to varying degrees by the sociocultural connotations or stereotypes people hold about the speakers of the languages concerned (Trudgill & Giles 1978; Giles & Niedzielski 1998). In addition, given the occurrence of comparisons and value judgments in paratexts to translations, but also in highly polished letters (Sidonius), literary commonplaces and conventions of genre should obviously be taken into consideration (Janson 1964, Thraede 1970), as potentially influencing an author's judgment.

Evaluative comparisons of languages in Christian Latin literature seem to occur only from the late 4th century onwards, as a concomitant to the upsurge of translation activity in the Latin West.²⁵ In about 370, the anonymous translator of Athanasius' *Vita Antonii* in § 1 of the epilogue comments on the difficulty of procuring a good translation (Bartelink 1976a: 36). He asks his readers to for-

²⁴ Cf. Lucretius, *De rerum natura* 1.139: *propter egestatem linguae et rerum nouitatem*.

²⁵ The belief that Latin is a 'poor' language is also evidenced in Greek sources, e.g. Basil of Caesarea, *Ep.* 214.4 (PG 32: 789): Περὶ δὲ τοῦ, ὅτι ὑπόστασις καὶ οὐσία οὐ ταύτων ἔστι, καὶ αὐτοὶ, ὡς νομίζω, ὑπεσημήναντο οἱ ἀπὸ τῆς Δύσεως ἀδελφοί, ἐν οἷς τὸ στενὸν τῆς ἑαυτῶν γλώττης ὑφορώμενοι, τὸ τῆς οὐσίας ὄνομα τῇ Ἑλλάδι φωνῇ παραδεδώκασιν, ἵνα, εἴ τις εἴη διαφορὰ τῆς ἑνοίας, σώζοιτο αὐτὴν ἐν τῇ εὐκρινεῖ καὶ ἀσυγχύτῳ διαστάσει τῶν ὄνομάτων. Cf. Van Rooy (2013: 41 n. 36) and Bardy (1948: 137 with n. 2), who also mentions Acacius of Beroea, *Ep.* 15 *inter Cyrillianas* (PG 77: 100): τῷ ἐστενῶσθαι τὴν φωνὴν καὶ μὴ δύνασθαι, πρὸς τὴν ἡμετέραν τῶν γραῦκῶν φράσιν, τρεῖς ὑποστάσεις λέγειν. Cf. the general remark made by Werner (1992: 16): 'Während es zahlreiche positive Urteile von Römern über die griechische Sprache gibt (Lukrez, Quintilian u.a.), existieren kaum positive Urteile von Griechen über das Lateinische (so bei Plutarch)'.

give him in case he has not been able to express (*exprimere*) the ‘power’ (*uim*) of the Greek words and states to be aware ‘what great weaknesses the Greek language has suffered (*quantas infirmitates sustinuit*)’ when translated into Latin. The translator’s apology—which is of course intertwined with, and biased by a *locus de modestia* (cf. Janson 1964: 124–149)—implies that to his mind, a particular ‘vigour’ characterizes Greek as a language, which almost inevitably gets lost when a Greek text is translated into Latin.

Ambrose and Rufinus

Ambrose—who in *Explanatio Psalmorum xii* 37.49.2 states in general terms that the repeated process of Bible translation attenuates the original meaning (Bartelink 1979b: 186)—comments in *Expositio Psalmi cxviii* 12.45 on the polysemy of the Greek word τέλος, which corresponds both to Latin *finis* and *consummatio*. In doing so, he argues that ‘we are not always able to convey (*exprimere*) the vigour (*uim*) of the Greek language’ (Bartelink 1979b: 186–187). To this acknowledgment, he attaches the interesting generalization that ‘the vigour (*uis*) and verbal sublime (*pompa sermonis*) are as a rule greater in Greek (*maior in Graeco plerumque*)’. Ambrose thus connects an observation on the difficulty of translation to an explicit value judgment, ascribing to Greek lexico-semantic and aesthetic qualities superior to those of Latin. Rufinus in the prefaces to his translations repeatedly uses expressions which seem to suggest the lexico-semantic ‘poverty’ of Latin. In the preface to his translation of eight homilies of Basil of Caesarea, he refers to *sermonis nostri paupertate*; in the preface to his translation of nine orations of Gregory of Nazianzus to *nostri sermonis paupertas*; and in §1 of the preface to his translation of the first book of Origen’s *De principiis* to *inopia sermonis nostri*. Bartelink (1976a: 37) argues that Rufinus uses the phrase *noster sermo* to denote the Latin language rather than his personal literary style or idiolect, but rightly points out that in these prefaces, the alleged poverty of the Latin language is closely tied in with a *locus de modestia*, and with an excuse for possible deficiencies in the translation as compared to the original.

Jerome and Boethius

Like Rufinus, both Jerome and Boethius could base their evaluative comparisons of different languages on their own experience in the practice of translation. In general terms, Jerome points out in *Quaestiones Hebraicae in Genesim* 22.2 that ‘it is difficult to turn the proper nature (*idioma*) of Hebrew into the Latin language’, and in *Tractatus in Psalmos* 114.4 that ‘the Greek and the Latin [text and/or language] cannot render (*exprimere non possunt*) the proper nature (*proprietatem*) of the Hebrew’. Like Ambrose, Jerome in *Commentarii in*

epistulas Paulinas Phil. 20 emphasizes the derivative nature of Bible translation—from Hebrew into Greek and from Greek into Latin—stating that ‘we too have to suffer (*patimur*) the same vigour (*uim*) in the Greek language, as the Greeks have to sustain (*sustinent*) in Hebrew’. The verbs used by Jerome suggest the translators’ frustration at the loss of *Aussagekraft* when choosing an equivalent in the target language for a word (in this particular case an interjection) in the source language. In *Ep.* 26.2 (Sect. 9.3, p. 318) Jerome refers to the exegetical works of Origen, paraphrasing the latter as saying that

because of the inherent proper nature of each language (*propter uernaculum linguae uniuscuiusque idioma*) things cannot sound in the same way with others as they are pronounced among their own people

and that

it is much better to leave things untranslated (*ininterpretata ponere*) than to attenuate their vigour by translating them (*uim interpretatione tenuare*).

While presenting Hebrew, Greek and Latin as the ‘three principal languages’ (cf. above, p. 233), Jerome thus introduces, from a practice-oriented perspective, an internal hierarchy among them. More specifically, his statements suggest that lexico-semantically, Hebrew is richer than Greek and Latin, and Greek richer than Latin. It is primarily in his reflections on Bible translation that this sense of hierarchy becomes clear.

In *Commentarii in Isaiam* 11.40.12/17 Jerome characterizes both Greek and Latin by their alleged lexico-semantic poverty (*sermonis pauperies*) when compared to Hebrew (cf. Kedar-Kopfstein 1994: 423). In *Ep.* 114.3.1 the same poverty (*Latinae linguae ... paupertate*) characterizes Latin when compared to Greek, which Jerome appreciates positively in terms of ‘genius’ (*ingenium*) and ‘eloquence’ (*facundia*) (Bartelink 1976a: 36). In *Commentarii in epistulas Paulinas* Eph. 1.4 Greek is characterized as ‘more copious’ (*latrior*) and more ‘fruitful’ (*felicior*) than Latin. At Phil. 20 in the same commentary (cf. *Aduersus Iouinianum* 1.13 [PL 23: 231B]), Jerome states that ‘the Latin language does not render (*non explicat*) the proper nature of Greek (*proprietatem Graecam*)’. He notes that with Latin *ita* as the rendering of Greek *vul*, ‘we say something more watery and more diluted (*aquatius et dilutius nescio quid*)’, and something which is rather different from what is written. In *Commentarii in Isaiam* 14.52.7/8 Jerome notes that Greek $\omega\pi\alpha$ may both mean ‘time’ or ‘beauty’, and connects this to the ‘ambiguity of the Greek language’ (*ambiguitas sermonis Graeci*). Elaborat-

ing on this, he states that it might also mean ‘sorrow’ or ‘anxiety’, ‘according to the ‘width’ (*latitudo*) of the Greek language’.²⁶ This passage implies that Greek is lexico-semantically more flexible than Latin.

Whereas all the above passages suggest that to Jerome’s mind, Hebrew is superior to Greek, and Greek is superior to Latin, there are also different ‘voices’ in Jerome’s works. An important document for this is *Ep. 106*, which is—like *Ep. 57* (Bartelink 1976b, 1980)—devoted to the practice and issues of translation. Jerome emphasizes the importance of safeguarding euphony (*εὐφωνία*) and elegance (*decor*) in the process of translation, and argues at 3.3 that

one should not consider the Latin language very narrow (*angustissima*) because of the fact that it is not able to translate word for word, since even the Greeks translate most of our words [i.e. the words of the Hebrew source text] with a roundabout (*circitu*), and make an effort to express Hebrew words not with the faith of interpretation, but with the properties of their language (*linguae suae proprietatibus*).

In other words, respecting the idiom of the target language rather than the letter of the source language is a good translation policy, and does not mean that the target language—Latin—is lexico-semantically poorer than the source language—Greek (cf. Süß 1932: 39; Bartelink 1976a: 36–37). Further on in the same letter, Jerome specifies how the ‘proper nature’ of the Latin language is to be understood, and how it is to be respected in the practice of translation. At 54.3 he writes that ‘when there is no change in the meaning, we seek to preserve the elegance of the Latin language (*Latini sermonis elegantiam*)’. Again at 55.1, he states that ‘where there is no damage in meaning, the euphony and proper nature (*εὐφωνία et proprietas*) of the language into which we are translating should be preserved’. Thus, the authoritative *Ep. 106* to a considerable extent differentiates Jerome’s evaluation of the capacities of the Latin language in the context of translation (cf. Fögen 2000: 223). Jerome’s negative appraisals of the Latin language might thus involve a topical excuse rather than an actual linguistic evaluation. It is not because Hebrew or Greek cannot be rendered literally into Latin that Latin is a ‘poor’ language, and most importantly, Latin in

26 From a terminological point of view, it is remarkable that *latitudo* is used here with a positive connotation, whereas in different contexts (Cicero, *De oratore* 2.22.91; Gregory of Tours, *Historiae* 9.6 [Buchner 1970 [1955]: vol. 2, 234]) the phrases *uerborum latitudo* and *linguae latitudo* are used pejoratively, in order to indicate a dragging accent (Riché 1972: 240 n. 135).

Jerome's opinion is a language characterized by elegance and euphony (cf. Banniard 1988). A possible explanation for this seeming contradiction in Jerome's works is that the places where Greek is proclaimed superior to Latin relate to the problematic translation of individual words.

Globally, Jerome's evaluation of Latin is thus more positive on the level of aesthetics than on the lexico-semantic level. Somewhat surprisingly in the light of his promotion of the *Hebraica ueritas*, the opposite is true of his evaluation of the 'biblical' languages Hebrew and Aramaic. In *Ep. 7.2.1* Jerome designates Aramaic as a *barbarus semisermo*, a 'barbarous semilanguage',²⁷ and in the preface to his translation of Daniel he refers to its 'puffing and hissing words' (*anhelantia stridentiaque uerba*).²⁸ In *Commentarii in epistulas Paulinas* Tit. 3.9 Jerome singles out those sounds which are still today commonly regarded as typically 'Semitic' or 'Eastern', namely, as he puts it slightly pejoratively, 'aspirations, and certain letters which are to be uttered with a scraping of the throat (*cum rasura gulæ*)'. Further on in the same commentary, he inveighs against the Jews, who, as he puts it, when pronouncing Hebrew in what they claim is the correct way, 'rejoice in their loose lips, their twisted tongue, the hiss of their saliva (*stridente saliuæ*) and the scraping of their throat (*rasa fauce*)' (cf. Süss 1932: 13).

In *Ep. 20.4.1*, an exegetic letter addressed to Pope Damasus, Jerome passes over a minute treatment of a particular problem in the Hebrew Bible text, stating that such a treatment would 'offend the reader (*molestiam tribuunt*) on account of the barbarity (*barbariam*) of language and letters'. In the same letter, he suggests that one has to 'suffer a little' in order to gain access to the *Hebraica ueritas*, and that his recourse to the Hebrew Bible text demands the effort of 'accommodating one's ear to a foreign language'. In *Liber interpretationis Hebraicorum nominum* (10)—which is actually an expanded translation of a Greek original—Jerome comments on the fact that while Greek and Latin have only one letter 's', the Hebrews have three (Sect. 10.4, p. 381). The first is called '*samech*', he writes, and this one 'is simply read as if it was written with our

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- ²⁷ Here I follow Kelly's (1975: 49 with n. 15) and Rebenich's (2002: 15) reading instead of *seni sermo* in Hilberg's edition (which is adopted by Millar 2010: 63). On Jerome's global attitude towards barbarians, cf. Palanque (1952) and the much more useful contribution by Weingarten (2005: 181–191). For a good study of the reality and images of barbarians in late antiquity, cf. Heather (1999).
- ²⁸ Jerome also uses the formula *stridentia anhelantiaque uerba* in *Ep. 125.12.1*, with reference to Hebrew (cf. Millar 2010: 63). In *Liber tertius aduersus libros Rufini* 27 he uses the phrase *stridor linguae* to refer to a characteristically 'African' pronunciation of Latin (cf. Adams 2007: 268–269).

letter *s'*. The other one is called ‘*shin*’, and in this letter ‘a certain hiss (*stridor quidam*) resounds which is foreign to our language’. The third is called ‘*tsade*’, and this letter ‘is totally abhorrent to our ears’ (*quam aures nostrae penitus reformidant*).

I have argued extensively elsewhere (Denecker 2015a) that Jerome’s negative aesthetic appraisal of Hebrew is not primarily concerned with the Hebrew language itself. Rather, it is inspired by his negative attitude (and that of his contemporaries) towards the speakers of Hebrew, that is, the Jews (Krauss 1893–1894, Lössl 2002), whom he depicts in his biblical commentaries (notably *Commentarii in epistulas Paulinas* Tit. 3.9) as arrogant and mocking pedants, and as slanderers of Christ and the Church. Secondarily, Jerome also puts his negative attitude towards the Jews and their language actively to use in defending himself against the charge that he was a ‘Judaizer’, that he, in other words, wanted to introduce Jewish elements into Christianity by way of his Bible translation and biblical commentaries (Newman 2001, Fonrobert 2005, Graves 2007b). He counters this charge by emphasizing the alleged difficulty and ugliness of the ‘biblical languages’ and by thus presenting his translations and commentaries as a service to the Latin Church.

In spite of his prolific translation activities, Boethius is far less liberal than Jerome with explicit metalinguistic comments (Courcelle ²1948: 261; Fögen 2000: 225–226). In the first edition of his commentary on Porphyry’s *Isagoge*, he points out at 1.24 (CSEL 48:74) that the philosophical term *entia* is derived from *esse* and that it is in fact an improper participial form (*in participiū abusionem tractum est*), which is ‘due to the narrowness (*angustatio*) and compression (*compressio*) of the Latin language’. In *Liber contra Eutychen et Nestorium* 3 (Moreschini ²2005: 215) he argues that the Greeks with the noun ὑπόστασις indicate ‘by far more neatly’ (*longe ... signatius*) the ‘indivisible substance of a rational nature’ whereas speakers of Latin, ‘due to a lack of meaningful words’ (*per inopiam significantium uocum*) are bound to use for this entity the term *persona*, which is a *translaticia ... nuncupatio*, an improper term sanctioned by custom. In concluding, Boethius repeats that Greece, which is ‘more skilled in words’ (*peritior ... sermonum*), calls this ὑπόστασις. Lastly, in his commentary on Aristotle’s *De interpretatione*, Boethius points out at 1.3 (Meiser 1880: 70–71) that someone who knows Greek will realize how much better the Greek phrase τὰ δὲ τὸν πέριξ sounds (*quantum melius Graeca oratione sonet*) than his own Latin rendering of it, namely *quod complectitur*. These few remarks clearly indicate that to Boethius’ mind, Latin is lexico-semantically (philosophically) appreciably ‘poorer’ than, and aesthetically inferior to Greek.

Augustine (and Isidore)

Throughout his works, Augustine repeatedly states the cultural supremacy of Greek over the other languages of the world (Neuschäfer 2004–2010: 1005; and cf. above, p. 234). In *De ciuitate Dei* 8.2 (cf. 8.10.2) he refers to literature written in Greek, ‘a language considered more honourable (*clarior*) than the other languages of the nations’.²⁹ Dyson translates *clarior habetur* in this sentence simply as ‘held in higher esteem’, and this notion is certainly involved. But *clarior* might also involve more specific value judgments, such as the belief that Greek ‘sounds brighter’ than other languages, or that Greek ‘is more intelligible’ or ‘logical’ than other languages (cf. Fögen 2000: 221–222 n. 4). Such value judgments about the aesthetics and the logical adequacy of Greek can be expected in connection with the literary and philosophical works produced in that language, which are dealt with in the passage at issue.

Augustine repeatedly puts the cultural primacy of Greek to use in his exegesis of Paul’s letter to the Galatians (3:28),³⁰ where ‘Greeks’ is used to designate all the ‘non-Jewish’ nations. In *Quaestiones in Heptateuchum* 7.37 (cf. *Ep.* 196.4.15), Augustine writes that Paul’s metonymical usage is based on the fact that ‘Greek excels so much (*ita excellat*) among the languages of the nations, that by this language all nations are decently symbolized’. Likewise, he argues in *Sermo* 229F.2 that ‘the apostle means by ‘Greeks’ all the nations, because of the fact that the Greek language is exalted (*extollitur*) among the nations’. Augustine’s statements were integrated by Isidore, who states in *Etym.* 9.1.4 that Greek is ‘considered more illustrious (*clarior habetur*) than the other nations’ languages’, and adds the aesthetic appraisal that Greek is ‘more sonorous (*sonantior*) than Latin or any other language’. Whereas Berschin (1980: 120) rightly observes that Isidore praises the beauty of Greek ‘im Anschluß an Quintilian’, there can be no doubt that Isidore’s actual source for this positive evaluation is Augustine.

On a couple of occasions, Augustine in the context of Bible translation asserts the ‘poverty’ of Latin as compared to the biblical source languages, Hebrew and Greek. In *Locutiones in Heptateuchum* 3.22 (cf. Süss 1932: 117) he

²⁹ The pseudo-Augustinian work entitled *Contra philosophos* (6th–7th c.) integrates statements on the supremacy of Greek from Augustine’s *De ciuitate Dei*. In *disputatio* 5, it refers to literature written in Greek, ‘a language considered more honourable (*quae lingua ... clarior habetur*) than the other languages of the nations (*inter ceteras gentium*)’ (cf. *De ciuitate Dei* 8.2). A little further on, it refers to ‘the Greeks, whose language (*quorum lingua*) is preeminent among the nations (*in gentibus praeminet*)’ (cf. *De ciuitate Dei* 8.10.2).

³⁰ Also cf. *Expositio epistulae ad Galatas* 31 (PL 35: 2127).

comments on the biblical turn of phrase *et dices ad eos dicens* that it ‘occurs very seldom and constrains (*coartat*) the poverty (*inopiam*) of the Latin language’. In my opinion the latter part of this statement can best be paraphrased as ‘exposes the lexico-semantic constraints of Latin (as compared to Greek)’. In *Quaestiones in Heptateuchum* 2.116 he points out that λόγιον was translated as *rationale*, whereas this usually renders λογικόν, and notes that this was done so because of the ‘poverty’ (*inopia*) of Latin (Courcelle 21948: 146). In *Ep.* 197.2 Augustine notes that there is a substantial difference between χρόνους and καιρούς (Matth. 24:36; Marc. 13:32), ‘although this could not too well be expressed in Latin (*Latine satis exprimi non potuerit*)’. In *Enarrationes in Psalmos* 123.8 he points out that *forsitan* in the sentence *Forsitan pertransit anima nostra* is an inadequate rendering of the particle ἄρα. Whereas the meaning of this particle could be more precisely rendered by *putas*, he argues, the latter is a common but not a correct Latin expression. Thus, because of the ‘deficiency’ of Latin (*deficiente Latinitate*) and because of the impossibility to use incorrect words in the Bible, the translator was bound to use *forsitan* to render ἄρα by approximation (cf. Fögen 2000: 222 with n. 6; Ferri 2015: 341).

It can be concluded from the above statements that to Augustine’s mind, Greek is both culturally more valuable and lexico-semantically richer than Latin. Given Augustine’s limited proficiency in Greek (cf. Introduction, p. 14), it seems reasonable to suggest that his positive appraisal of the Greek language is considerably biased by the sociocultural stereotypes which are for him attached to it.

Sidonius Apollinaris

It is clear from Sidonius’ letters and poems that the aristocratic bishop regards and actively presents languages other than ‘classical’ Latin as ‘inferior’ languages, that is, as ugly and/or underdeveloped languages. Whereas Sidonius in *Ep.* 4.17.2 refers to Latin by means of the extolling phrase *sermonis pompa Romani*,³¹ he uses a number of striking depreciating labels in order to indicate his negative value judgment of other languages. In *Ep.* 3.3.2 he refers to Celtic or Gaulish as ‘the rough scale of Celtic speech’ (*sermonis Celtici squama*) which Gaulish nobility needs to ‘discard’ (*depositura*) in favour of ‘classical Latin’ (Banniard 1992b: 417–421; Adams 2003: 690).

In *Ep.* 5.5.2–3 Sidonius makes a number of depreciating statements about the Germanic language of the Burgundians (Adams 2003: 277), but now often

³¹ The passage at issue is discussed extensively by Amherdt (1999: 383–390) and Gerth (2013: 189–190).

in an ironic way, since he is writing to one of his aristocratic connections. Sidonius pretends to be surprised about the fact that his addressee Syagrius—who is an educated speaker of Latin but lives among the Burgundians and allegedly speaks their language fluently—has so easily acquired the ‘euphony of an alien race’ (*euphoniam gentis alienae*) (cf. Harries 1996: 34–35).³² A little further on, he jokes that in the presence of his addressee, ‘the barbarian is afraid of committing a barbarism in his own language’ (*formidet linguae suae facere barbarus barbarismum*). Both statements should be read in an ironic way, and thus imply that the Germanic language of the Burgundians in Sidonius’ opinion lacks euphony and a proper norm for correctness, both of which are (allegedly) characteristic of developed *Kultursprachen*. Still in the same letter, Sidonius ironically presents his addressee as the ‘new Amphion among the Burgundians’, after the iconic singer-musician from Graeco-Roman mythology. He subsequently pictures this new Amphion as ‘attuning the lyre, but indeed a three-stringed lyre’ (*sed trichordibus*). With regard to the latter phrase, Loyen (1970a: 181 n. 11) has noted that it is ‘en tout cas ... une expression péjorative’, while according to Anderson (LCL 420: 183 n. 3) it ‘implies very simple and uncomplicated’. By way of the association between the lyre and poetry, it seems safe to assume that it is actually the Germanic language of the Burgundians which Sidonius presents as an underdeveloped instrument. Indeed, while ‘elaboration’ (*Ausbau*) is often regarded as characteristic of ‘high-prestige varieties’, lack of it is commonly taken as indicative of ‘low-prestige varieties’ (Kloss 1967).

A last piece of evidence is found in *Carmen* 12, a playful poetical refusal (*recusatio*) to a senator named Catullinus, who had allegedly requested Sidonius to compose an *epithalamium* on the occasion of his marriage. In refusing, Sidonius argues that the Burgundian allies, baracked in his Lyons estate, preclude any of his poetical activity. He states not to be able to compose verses while he has to ‘endure Germanic words’ (*Germanica uerba sustinentem*; 12.4). Although these passages can be assumed to reflect Sidonius’ actual ideas to a reasonable degree, they are certainly influenced by epistolary and poetical commonplaces and by Sidonius’ efforts in constructing an episcopal elite identity.

³² All factual information relating to Sidonius’ letters and poems is based on Loyen’s editions (cf. Bibliography).

Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to explore the different ways in which early Christian Latin authors attempt to come to grips with the widened and diversified linguistic landscape in which they move. The chapter was organized in four sections, corresponding to the different ‘strategies’ or approaches the authors adopt.

The first section dealt with authors developing language classifications. A first language classification worthy of this name is proposed only by the end of the 5th century, by Arnobius the Younger. By combining the ‘Augustinian’ number of 72 languages (Gen. 10) and the *mille generationes* from 1 Par. 16:15, Arnobius develops an intricate and—in the absence of extant source texts—innovative classification, falling into three language families. Arnobius’ classification does not seem to have exerted any impact before it was quoted by Bede. In the beginning of the 7th century, Isidore of Seville developed more well-known classifications, namely a threefold phonetic-articulatory classification of the world’s languages, a fivefold subdivision of the Greek dialects (called *linguae*), and a fourfold periodization of the Latin language (with diachronic varieties also denoted *linguae*). Attention has been paid to the terminology used and to the criteria on which these classifications are based, as well as to Isidore’s sources and possible originality.

The second section dealt with authors proposing a ‘premier league’ by selecting a number of languages allegedly excelling above the other languages of the world. The primary biblical foundation for such selections is the trilingual inscription on Christ’s cross (Ioh. 19:20), but this biblical evidence is often connected to political, sociocultural, and exegetical arguments. It has been shown that Hilary of Poitiers, Jerome, Augustine, and Isidore maintain the threefold selection of Hebrew, Greek and Latin. While Hilary provides the earliest evidence for this selection in Latin Christianity, it is Jerome who coins the expression *tribus principalibus linguis*, and it is only by Isidore that these languages are ‘consecrated’ as the *tres linguae sacrae*. Within this threefold selection, the authors introduce different internal hierarchies. A remarkable ‘dissenting voice’ is Apponius, who extends the selection to five languages by means of Egyptian and Syriac/Assyrian, on the basis of the five characters of the beloved in Cant. and the five cities in Is. 19:18a. Presumably due to his peripheral status when faced with such authorities as Hilary, Jerome and Augustine, Apponius’ innovation seems to have lacked any impact, at least during the period covered by this study.

The third section was concerned with authors perceiving or establishing linguistic affinity. It has been shown that only Jerome and Isidore explicitly

conceive of Hebrew not only as the primeval language, but also as the genealogical protolanguage. Among the ‘Semitic’ languages, Jerome perceives an ‘affinity’ or ‘proximity’ between the Hebrew language of his days on the one hand and Syriac, ‘Chaldean’/Aramaic, Punic (by way of Phoenician), Egyptian and ‘Canaanite’ on the other. Among ‘non-Semitic’ languages, he perceives affinity between Galatian and ‘Trierisch’, and between Latin and Greek. Although within a ‘biblical’ framework, all languages derive from the Hebrew protolanguage, it seems reasonable to infer from Jerome’s comments that ‘Semitic’ languages in his opinion occupy a position ‘closer’ to the Hebrew protolanguage, possibly due to a more ancient affinity. As a consequence of Jerome’s terminological vagueness, it is difficult to decide whether this ‘closeness’ should be understood as genealogical, structural, or geographic proximity. Perhaps it is not even necessary to decide and Jerome’s notion of linguistic ‘closeness’ should be understood approximately in the sense of a *Sprachbund*. Augustine, by contrast to Jerome and Isidore, does not explicitly indicate Hebrew as the genealogical protolanguage, but this must have been his implicit assumption. Presumably joining his notions of Punic to the statements he found in Jerome’s works, Augustine perceives an ‘affinity’ or ‘proximity’ between Hebrew, Punic, and Syriac. The comments made by Isidore on linguistic affinity are second-hand.

The fourth and last section was devoted to authors comparing languages to each other in terms of ‘vices’ and ‘virtues’. Methodologically, it has been insisted upon that the authors’ linguistic value judgments are biased not only by literary commonplaces and conventions of genre, but also by the sociocultural connotations or stereotypes they hold about a particular language and its speakers. From the discussion of authors with an actual experience in the practice of translation (Ambrose, Rufinus, Jerome, Boethius), it has become clear that paratexts to translations are especially rich in linguistic comparisons and value judgments. A comparable case is Augustine, who procured no translations but who did compare different (Greek and Latin) Bible versions. These authors’ judgments are relatively uniform: Hebrew is lexico-semantically richer than both Greek and Latin (at least in the derivative process of Bible translation); and Greek is culturally more valuable, aesthetically preferable, and lexico-semantically richer than Latin. However, Jerome in *Ep. 106* provides some counterweight in favour of Latin. The fourth section also dealt with Jerome’s and Sidonius Apollinaris’ negative appraisals of foreign, ‘barbarian’ languages, which have been explained in various ways with reference to the ‘social connotations hypothesis’.

The Sentence Level

Having dealt in Chapter 7 with early Christian Latin authors' linguistic observations on the language level, I will now move on to discuss their observations on the sentence level, which correspond to what we would call 'syntactic' observations. In the two remaining chapters of this third part, I will then proceed by 'zooming in' on the word level (Ch. 9, p. 287f.) and on the letter level (Ch. 10, p. 340f.). It is important to emphasize from the very beginning of this chapter that the translation of biblical and other religious texts (Marti 1974) constitutes a crucial context for the authors' contrastive observations on the sentence level. The practice of translating the Bible or of comparing Bible versions in different languages to each other made early Christian Latin authors much better aware of 'syntactic' differences between languages than their pagan predecessors had been.

The level of syntax is a problematic one as far as ancient linguistic description is concerned (cf. primarily Baratin 1989; furthermore Donnet 1967, Taylor 1993, Swiggers & Wouters 2003a). It seems justified to follow Swiggers & Wouters' judgment (2003b: 35) that syntax was only 'surreptitiously' or 'indirectly' present in ancient linguistic description. This is why scholarly literature on syntax in antiquity often focuses on a number of specific 'clues', such as word order, conjunctions, and solecism. I will follow the same approach in this chapter by first investigating general conceptions of 'syntax' and subsequently focusing on these specific clues. The chapter will thus take the form of a 'detective story' to some extent (cf. Sluiter 1994 on Baratin 1989). I will maintain a broad definition of the terms 'syntax' and 'syntactic'; more specifically, I follow Percival (1987b: 67) in maintaining that 'the most basic principle to establish at the outset is that in ancient grammar the domain covered by syntax was the sentence' (cf. Baratin 1988, Charpin 1988).

Generally, it is safe to state that ancient grammarians did not provide a systematic discussion of syntactic reflection, and that it is doubtful whether they had a notion of syntax as we know it (Swiggers & Wouters 2003b: 36). Nevertheless, there are a number of exceptions. First, a specific type of syntax entered the grammatical tradition by way of Stoic dialectic, which paid much attention to the linguistic expression of logical contents and tried to categorize different types of 'utterances' or 'propositions' ($\alpha\xi\omega\mu\alpha\tau\alpha$ or *proloquia*) (Collart 1954: 53; Collart 1978c: 200; Egli 1987; Baratin 1989: 115–255). It is plausibly to this type of syntax—which tried to establish, among other things, when an

utterance can be considered ‘complete’—that the (largely lost) third hexad of Varro’s (116–27 BC) *De lingua Latina* was devoted.¹ This can be inferred from Varro’s acknowledgment at 8.1.1 (cf. 7.7.110) that he will deal in the third hexad with the question of ‘how these words are then combined systematically with each other and produce a sentence’ (*ut ea inter se ratione coniuncta sententiam efferant*) (Taylor 1974: 10–11 [tr.]; Collart 1978b: 8; Baratin 1989: 202–255).

Second, the Greek grammarian Apollonius Dyscolus (2nd century AD) is often said to have produced the first real treatise on syntax with his Περὶ σύνταξεως, ‘On construction’, in four books (Wouters & Swiggers 1999). However, Apollonius’ approach to σύνταξις differs fundamentally from ‘modern’ approaches to syntax in that it centers on the factors of case and agreement and that it thus takes the individual word as its point of departure (Ch. 9, p. 287f.). This is an observation which can be extrapolated to ancient discussions of ‘syntactic’ issues in general. The beginnings of a more systematic syntactic reflection in the Latin tradition are mostly situated in the early 6th century, when Priscian—possibly a native of Caesarea in Mauretania, but active in Constantinople—composed his *Ars grammatica*, the last two books of which (17 and 18), together known as *De constructione*, were devoted to syntax (Percival 1987b: 65–66; Baratin 1989: 365–485). It is important to note that Priscian’s observations on syntax ‘virtually amounted to a translation of portions of Apollonius Dyscolus’ *Peri syntaxeos*’, a fact which Priscian did not conceal (Percival 1987b: 66). Accordingly, the reservations which have been made above regarding Apollonius’ approach to ‘syntax’ also apply to Priscian’s. However, neither the work of Apollonius Dyscolus (presumably due to its language) nor the work of Priscian (due to its date) exerted an appreciable influence in the works of early Christian Latin authors, and it is primarily the type of syntax going back to Stoic dialectic that will play a role of significance in this chapter.

In order to reconstruct early Christian Latin authors’ views on matters of syntax, I will focus on their statements centering on a number of ‘clues’. In extant scholarly literature, some of the clues frequently discussed in connection to syntax are word order, conjunctions, solecism, and *figurae grammaticae*. The research questions which will be formulated are the following. On a general, conceptual level, it will be asked (1) whether the authors deal with matters of syntax in terms of ‘joining words to form sentences’, and (2) whether

¹ Cf. Baratin & Desbordes (1981: 39): ‘La perte de la troisième partie est particulièrement fâcheuse, dans la mesure où l’on ne sait pas de quel point de vue Varro envisageait la relation entre les mots: on a parlé de “pseudo-syntaxe” ou de “logique”, mais l’on se fait sans doute beaucoup d’illusions sur la différence de la logique et de la syntaxe, et à tout le moins leur imbrication n’est pas forcément une absurdité.’

they deal with matters of syntax in terms of ‘complete utterances’. With regard to the specific ‘clues’ mentioned above, it will be asked whether the authors make observations with syntactic relevance (3) on the issue of word order, (4) on conjunctions, and (5) on the solecism. Specific attention will be paid to observations with syntactic relevance made from a contrastive point of view, mostly in the context of (Bible) translation. It is important to note that within the Latin language system, the phenomena covered frequently involve the factors of case and agreement. These will be discussed whenever relevant.

1 Syntactic Reflection in Terms of ‘Joining Words to Form Sentences’

One of the most basic conceptions a language user can have of syntax is that words are joined together in order to form a sentence or utterance. This notion is evidenced in § 2 of Apollonius Dyscolus’ Περὶ συντάξεως (Taylor 1993: 279), and it occurs in a fragment from Varro’s works preserved by Diomedes, *Ars grammatica* (KGL 1: 426–427) (Collart 1954: 52), which reads as follows:

The beginnings of grammar rise from spoken letters (*grammaticae initia ab elementis surgunt*), spoken letters are represented by written letters (*elementa figurantur in litteras*),² letters are combined to syllables (*litterae in syllabas coguntur*), a word is comprised of syllables (*syllabis comprehenditur dictio*), words are combined to parts of speech (*dictiones coguntur in partes orationis*), and an utterance is comprised of parts of speech (*partibus orationis consummatur oratio*).

This passage shows that at least some ancient thinkers believed that words are joined together to form utterances. On a general level, Varro’s fragment is illustrative of a global ‘generative’ and ‘combinatory’ conception of how language ‘works’, a conception which also has its implications for Chapter 9 and 10, and which in the inverted way provided the structure for Part 3 of this study as a whole (language, sentence, word, letter). The general notion of joining words together to form sentences is also evidenced in Jerome’s *Commentarii in Ezechielem* 9.30.1/19, where the author in an analogy to his exegetical approach states to have ‘spelled out’ the ‘letters’ or ‘elementary matters’ (*elementa*) as one

² As is clear from the context, *elementum* in this specific passage means ‘spoken letter’, whereas *littera* means ‘written letter’; on different uses of *elementum* and *littera*, cf. the introduction to Ch. 10.

would do for little children, ‘in order that they may arrive, by way of letters, syllables, words, and the connection of words (*uerborumque contextum*), to the reading of prose or poetry’. Although Jerome is primarily emphasizing the value of a detailed exegesis by the analogy with *elementa*, the phrase *uerborum contextus* is of considerable interest with regard to the matter of syntax. A comparable statement can be found in *Ep.* 121.10.24, where Jerome explains that beginning readers proceed from letters, over syllables and words, ‘to the composition of an utterance’ (*ad texendam orationem*) (Sect. 10.1, p. 346). In both passages quoted, attention should be drawn to the metaphor of ‘weaving’ (*contextus, texere*), which can be connected to the notion that words are joined together to form sentences.

This general notion also emerges from various isolated statements in the works of Isidore of Seville—I have found no relevant statements dating to the period between Jerome and this late witness. Outside of the *Etymologiae*, a relevant case can be found in Isidore’s *Differentiae* book 1, or *De differentiis uerborum*, at 154 (578), where the encyclopaedist tells the difference between *uerbum* and *sermo*.³ Isidore explains that according to the grammarians—Codoñer (1992: 354) in her edition of *Differentiae* 1 does not indicate a source for this entry—*uerbum* is ‘a part of a single utterance’ (*unius pars orationis*), while *sermo* is so called ‘from joining together (*a serendo*) various words of an utterance (*plurimorum uerborum orationis*)’. Several relevant observations occur in book 1 of the *Etymologiae*, which is in fact a grammar embedded in Isidore’s encyclopaedia.⁴ It should be stressed that virtually all of Isidore’s statements rely on grammarians active prior to him. However, as the first book remains to be published in the Budé *Auteurs latins du Moyen Âge* series, the volumes of which generally include an excellent *apparatus fontium*,⁵ it seems more useful for present purposes to focus on the syntactic relevance of the passages concerned than on the identification of their sources. One relevant case in *Etymologiae*, analogous to the one in *Differentiae* quoted above, can be found at 1.5.3. Having reduced *oratio*, ‘discourse’ or ‘utterance’, etymologically

³ For general studies on the nature and purpose (the avoidance of synonymy) of ancient collections of grammatical / lexicographical *differentiae*, cf. Codoñer (1985) and Flores (1994).

⁴ By involving this grammar embedded in Isidore’s *Etymologiae* in my discussion of the authors’ linguistic observations on the sentence level, I am going beyond the normal limits of my corpus of primary sources, which in principle does not include ‘language manuals’ (cf. Introduction, p. 4).

⁵ This may seem an unjustified choice in times of commonly accessible digital databases, but due to the various intermediary sources relied upon by Isidore, the task of *Quellenforschung* is an exceptionally demanding one in his case.

to *oris ratio* (an etymology which is ubiquitous in Latin grammarians and Christian authors), Isidore points out that an utterance (*oratio*) is ‘a connection of words, together with meaning’ (*contextus uerborum cum sensu*). Here again we observe the (dead) metaphor of weaving in connection to conceptions of syntax.

In a number of further relevant comments throughout the *Etymologiae*, various parts of speech are defined with reference to the way in which they are connected to other words. It should be stressed that only the criterion used to define the respective word classes is a ‘syntactic’ one, while the observations are actually situated on the word level. At 1.8.3–4 Isidore states that *hic*, *haec*, and *hoc* are called *articuli* ‘because they are pressed together (*artantur*), that is, connected (*colligantur*), with nouns’ (e.g. *hic orator*). Isidore subsequently discusses the differences in use of *hic*, *haec*, *hoc* either as an article or as a pronoun. When it is joined (*coniungitur*) to a noun, it is an article (!), but when it is not, it is a demonstrative pronoun (cf. Schöpsdau 1992: 126–127; Denecker & Swiggers forthc.). At 1.13 Isidore explains that the preposition (*praepositio*) is so called ‘because it is placed in front (*praeponatur*) of nouns and verbs’ (cf. Sect. 8.3, p. 275f., on word order). At 1.14 he points out that the interjection (*interiectio*) is so called ‘because it is interjected (*interiecta*), that is, interposed (*interposita*), between phrases (*sermonibus*)’ (cf. Biville 2003). This etymological definition—for which no source is indicated by Fontaine (1959: 111)—implies that an interjection does not belong to the ‘normal’ or ‘essential’ connection of words forming a sentence. A more extensive remark occurs at 1.10 (cf. 1.18.2), where Isidore expounds that the adverb (*aduerbium*) ‘is so called because it is added to verbs (*uerbis accedat*)’ and ‘because it is always completed (*adimpleatur*) when joined to a verb (*uerbo iunctum*)’. The latter part of the definition is based on the belief that by contrast to a verb, an adverb in itself ‘does not have a full meaning (*plenam significationem*)’.⁶ In order to give an example, Isidore quotes the adverb *hodie*, which allegedly has no value in itself, but when a verb is added to it—as in *hodie scribo*—‘with the added verb (*iuncto uerbo*) you have completed the sense (*implesti sensum*)’.

From these definitions it is clear that the way in which words are joined to other words—which is essentially a syntactic fact—is an important criterion in defining word classes or parts of speech. In addition, Isidore’s definition of the adverb seems to involve a notion of syntax in terms of ‘complete utterances’, which will be discussed in the following section (8.2). For

⁶ Cf. e.g. Donatus, *Ars minor* 5: *Aduerbium quid est? Pars orationis, quae adiecta uerbo significationem eius explanat atque implet.*

now, it is worth pointing out that the completeness of an utterance is at least in part defined with reference to a semantic criterion, namely the completeness of meaning; a sentence is only syntactically complete when it ‘makes sense’.

2 Syntactic Reflection in Terms of ‘Complete Utterances’

A second type of general reflection on matters of syntax consists in the conception of a sentence as a ‘complete utterance’. In global terms, this means that a sentence can only be considered correct when it provides a ‘complete’ linguistic expression of its contents. Accordingly, a sentence is incorrect (a) when it lacks the necessary linguistic elements (deficiency) or (b) when it includes too much linguistic elements (redundancy) to enable a good understanding of its contents. It appears that in ‘common thought’ on the issue, the notion of a correct sentence as a complete utterance was connected to the ‘proper nature’ of a language (*proprietas* or *idioma*), which should probably be conceived of as the intuition of the native speaker. As it is in situations of linguistic ‘confrontation’ that this intuition is most easily articulated, early Christian Latin authors often comment on (in)correct sentences as (in)complete utterances from a contrastive perspective, in the context of translation.

In combination with this general tendency in ‘common thought’, it should be repeated that a specific kind of syntax entered the grammatical tradition by way of Stoic dialectic, which was concerned with the linguistic expression of logical contents and the study of propositions (Baratin 1989: 115–255). As Taylor explains (1993: 268–269), propositions (sometimes *λεκτά*) are in Stoic theory divided into two classes, ‘those that are complete in themselves and those that are not, i.e., are in some sense deficient or defective’. In support of this point, Taylor quotes Diogenes Laertius’ *Vitae philosophorum* 7.63, which is plausibly an abbreviated representation of the Stoic theory at issue. Following Taylor, I quote the passage concerned:

By verbal expression (*τὸ λεκτόν*) they mean that of which the content corresponds to some rational presentation. Of such expressions (*τῶν δὲ λεκτῶν*) the Stoics say that some are complete in themselves (*τὰ μὲν ... αὐτοτελῆ*) and others defective (*τὰ δὲ ἀλλιπῆ*). Those are defective the enunciation of which is unfinished (*τὰ ἀναπάρτιστον ἔχοντα τὴν ἐκφοράν*), as e.g. ‘writes’, for we inquire ‘who?’, whereas in those that are complete in themselves the enunciation is finished (*τὰ ἀπηρτισμένην ἔχοντα τὴν ἐκφοράν*), as ‘Socrates writes’.

It has already been pointed out that the largely lost third hexad of Varro's *De lingua Latina* was probably devoted to (some kind of) syntax of the Latin language (Baratin 1989: 202–220), and it has been argued by Baratin (1989: 221–255) that the subject matter of this third hexad probably amounted to this specific kind of 'syntax' based on Stoic dialectic and its formal logic of language and propositions. More specifically, Collart (1978b: 8) points out that Varro devotes an extensive portion of *De lingua Latina* 24—preserved by Aulus Gellius, *Noctes Atticae* 16.8.1–14—to a classification of 'propositions' (*ἀξιώματα, proloquia*), which he defines as 'sentences in which nothing is lacking' (*sententiae in quibus nihil desideratur*). There can be no doubt that because of Varro's pervasive influence on the Latin grammatical tradition, later linguistic description frequently maintained this logical or dialectical approach when dealing with matters of syntax. More specifically, we will see that early Christian Latin authors conceived of a correct sentence as a 'complete utterance'. I will consistently use 'utterance' instead of 'proposition' or 'enunciation' in an attempt to close the terminological gap between the logical and the linguistic perspectives.

A final point of interest is that in order to indicate an element lacking in an utterance, the Latin tradition of grammar and rhetoric could rely on the concept and term of *ellipsis*, going back to ἔλλειψις (Lausberg 3rd 1990: 346–347 § 690). Donatus in *Ars maior* 3.3 defines *ellipsis* as 'some kind of lack of a necessary word (*defectus quidam necessariae dictionis*)', which a broken sentence misses (*quam desiderat praecisa sententia*)'. He gives the example of the incomplete utterance *haec secum*, which lacks the verb *loquebatur*. Donatus' definition shows that *ellipsis* could easily be used to deal with incomplete utterances in an uncomplicated way.

Jerome on Complete Utterances in a Contrastive Framework

The notion of a correct sentence as a complete utterance can be found in several comments with syntactic relevance made by Jerome. It should be noted that all the comments at issue relate to specific sentences in the biblical text. Accordingly, they are *ad hoc* in nature and do not contribute to a systematic approach of syntactic issues. This becomes clear in a couple of contrastive observations on Greek and Latin syntax in *Ep.* 106, a letter addressed to Sunnia and Fretela, two (possibly fictitious) Gothic clergymen. Whether or not Sunnia and Fretela were real addressees, the letter at issue clearly serves as a 'showcase' for Jerome's approach to biblical philology, where he illustrates the exegetical advantage of his return to the *Hebraica ueritas* by his solutions to specific issues of translation and exegesis (Sect. 5.3, p. 159f.). At 48.2 Jerome comments on the Latin verse *terribili et ei, qui auferit spiritus principum*, which is his own

translation from the Greek of Ps. 75:13. With regard to the less than perfect correspondence between the words in the Greek and the Latin versions, he makes the following comment:

You say that *ei* is not written in the Greek text; that is true, but had I not added *ei* (*nisi apposuerimus ‘ei’*), the Latin utterance would not sound well (*Latinus sermo non resonat*). For we cannot say in a correct way (*neque enim possumus recte dicere*): *terribili et qui aufert spiritus principum*.

As can be seen from this comment, Jerome's conception of syntax is 'intuitive' in nature. In the contrastive framework in which this passage is embedded, the different criteria for a correct sentence implicitly relate to the 'proper nature' of Greek and Latin respectively. When the Greek criterion is transposed onto a Latin sentence, the latter does not agree with the intuition or expectation of a native speaker of Latin—it 'does not sound well' (*non resonat*). The comment also shows that Jerome conceives of a correct sentence as a complete utterance. In order to construct a correct Latin sentence (*recte*), he had no choice but to supplement a personal pronoun in Latin to the words included in the Greek source text. Something similar can be seen at 50.4 in the same letter, where Jerome accounts for his translation of Ps. 77:38, *et propitius fiet peccatis eorum et non disperdet eos*:

You say that there is no *eos* in the Greek text, and that is true; but in order for the sentence not to remain suspended (*ne sententia pendeat*), we have supplemented (*compleuimus*) the Latin utterance according to its proper nature (*sua proprietate*).

Jerome's use of the words *pendeat* and *compleuimus* shows that he thinks of syntax in terms of complete utterances. In the present statement, the supplying of words in the Latin sentence is connected more explicitly to the 'proper nature' (*sua proprietate*)—the intuition of the native speaker—of the Latin language. Still in the same letter, in § 59, Jerome comments on *dicit Domino: susceptor meus es tu*, which is his own translation of Ps. 90:2. He quotes his addressees' supposed objection that there is no equivalent to *es* in their Greek text (apparently different from the Septuagint) and replies:

I will tell you even more, namely that neither *es* nor *tu* stand in the Hebrew text, but that this is added (*positum est*) in the Septuagint and in Latin versions because of the euphony and the proper sequence of words (*pro εὐφωνίᾳ et uerborum consequentia*).

In this passage, Jerome connects the suppletion of the Latin sentence again to the ‘proper nature’ or the intuition of the native speaker of that language. Rather than designating ‘euphony’ *stricto sensu*, Jerome’s term εὐφωνία seems to amount to the common expression (negatively phrased) that a sentence ‘does not sound well’. In like manner, the phrase *uerborum consequentia*, rather than indicating word order in the specific sense (Sect. 8.3, p. 275f.), seems to correspond to the (again negative) expression that a sentence ‘does not run properly’.

Augustine on Complete Utterances in a Contrastive Framework

Like Jerome, Augustine in his exegetic works on the Old Testament makes a number of contrastive observations centering on the notion of complete utterances—both in terms of deficiency and of redundancy. He may have drawn in part on Jerome’s relevant statements, but he presumably relied also on his own ability to compare the text of the Latin version(s) to the Greek Septuagint. Rather than comparing Latin to Hebrew ‘syntax’, as Jerome does, Augustine is contrasting a type of syntax allegedly characteristic of ‘biblical language’—i.e. a type of Latin including typically Hebrew and Greek elements that are due to the process of translation—to the ‘standard’ type of syntax of ‘classical Latin’. An isolated contrastive observation relating to a complete utterance can be found in Augustine’s *Enarrationes in Psalmos* 4.4, where he discusses the verse *Et scitote quoniam admirabilem fecit Dominus sanctum tuum* (Ps. 4:4). Augustine points out that

if anyone is disturbed by the superaddition of the conjunction (*coniunctio superaddita*), as he says: *et scitote*, it is easy to observe in the Bible that this way of speaking is common (*familiare*) to that language in which the prophets spoke.

As can be inferred from this remark, Augustine is aware that it is uncommon to begin a Latin sentence with the conjunction *et*. His use of *superaddita* suggests that just as Jerome, Augustine conceives of a (correct) sentence as a complete utterance. Any elements added to an utterance that is already complete are in fact superfluous. Nevertheless, Augustine points out that the conjunction (*waw*, ⟨ו⟩) at the beginning of a sentence is a common feature of Hebrew syntax.

A rich and largely unexplored source for statements of syntactic interest in terms of ‘complete utterances’ are Augustine’s *Locutiones in Heptateuchum*. Like the *Quaestiones in Heptateuchum*, the *Locutiones* are the result of the reading and annotation of the Heptateuch which Augustine undertook while preparing books 11 to 22 of his *De ciuitate Dei*. In a lapidary introduction

(possibly conceived as a title) Augustine defines the purpose and scope of his *Locutiones* as follows (cf. Chin 2008: 102; Weber 2004–2010: 1049):

Characteristic expressions of the Bible (*locutiones scripturarum*), which appear to agree to the respective peculiarities (*quae uidentur secundum proprietates*)—which are called *idiomata* in Greek (*quae idiomata Graece uocantur*)—of the Hebrew and the Greek language (*linguae Hebraicae uel Graecae*).

In even more general terms, Augustine repeats in his *Retractationes* 2.54 that in the *Locutiones in Heptateuchum*, he ‘noted particular expressions (*notatis locutionibus singulorum*) which are less customary in our language (*quae minus usitatae sunt linguae nostrae*)’, and emphasizes that he did this with an eye to a sound biblical exegesis. As Süss (1932: 4–5; tr. mine) rightly points out, Augustine’s work provides a discussion of those biblical passages ‘which due to Graecisms and Hebraisms have acquired an in itself un-Latin character’. Still according to Süss (cf. Marrou 1958: 427–428), Augustine’s methodological equipment in discussing these biblical passages consisted in the theory of *idiomata* (ἰδιώματα) or *proprietates*, which was an established component of the grammatical tradition, and had long been used in comparisons between Latin and Greek. It seems useful in this connection to follow Süss by quoting the introductory remark to book 5 of the 4th-century grammarian Charisius’ *Ars grammatica*, entitled *De idiomatibus*:

The idioms which are characteristic of our language (*idiomata quae sunt nostri sermonis*) must indeed be countless. For idioms are all those things which we pronounce according to our own usage (*pro nostro more effemimus*) and not according to that of the Greeks (*non secundum Graecos*). But to put it briefly, idioms arise either from the gender of nouns, which we have contrary to the usage of the Greeks—for when we say *hic honor* for ἡ τιμή, this happens in masculine gender with us but in feminine gender with them—or they arise from the opposite meanings of verbs, as in *luctor* and *παλαίω*. For this verb is pronounced passively with us, but actively with the Greeks. And likewise with the remaining parts of speech (*sic etiam et per ceteras partes orationis*), a manifold discrepancy of idioms can be observed (*idiomatum dissonantia multiplex reperiatur*).

As can be seen from this passage, *idioma* is an established but very elastic concept and term in the grammatical tradition. In Charisius’ account, it is

explicitly connected to the sanctioning factor of usage, and implicitly to the ‘proper nature’ of either Latin or Greek. Whereas Charisius uses *idioma* for the specific purpose of contrasting Latin to Greek, we will see that Augustine expands its use to the interpretation of ‘biblical language’ (as defined above, p. 267) in contrast to ‘normal’ or ‘classical’ Latin.

The *Locutiones in Heptateuchum* have been investigated extensively by Rütting (1916) and—with special reference to ‘biblical language’—by Süss (1932). However, these scholars paid little attention to the specific ‘syntactic’ interest of the *Locutiones*. Both Tornau (2004–2010b: 1045–1046) and Weber (2004–2010: 1051) mention the syntactic interest of this work, but they cannot enter into much detail due to the concise format of the relevant entries in the *Augustinus-Lexikon*. In what follows, I will provide a detailed analysis of the contrastive observations with a specific syntactic interest in Augustine’s *Locutiones*. If a correct sentence is conceived of as a complete utterance, this means that an incorrect sentence either lacks one or more components, or includes too much of them. I will first discuss Augustine’s observations on cases of redundancy, and subsequently his remarks on cases of deficiency.

A first observation on a case of redundancy—comparable to the one in *Enarrationes in Psalmos* 4.4 (cf. above, p. 267)—can be found in *Locutiones in Heptateuchum* 2.32. Augustine here comments on the verse *Si loquetur uobis Pharaon dicens: date nobis signum aut portentum, et dices Aaron fratri suo: sume uirgam* (Ex. 7:9; cf. Süss 1932: 24). Augustine proposes to leave the conjunction *et* out from this verse, introducing his choice as follows: ‘Did not the usage of our way of speaking (*locutionis nostrae consuetudo*), and a certain correctness of it (*quaedam eius integritas*) demand that it was said as follows ...?’ Having proposed his alternative, he asks:

So for what reason is *et* added there (*additum est*), if not because of some peculiarity of the Hebrew way of speaking (*nisi aliqua proprietate locutionis Hebraicae*)? For it cannot be said to be characteristically Greek either (*neque Graeca esse perhibetur*).

This passage shows that to Augustine’s sense, the conjunction *et* is redundant (in the specific context of this conditional clause) to a complete Latin utterance. Since the same would be true in Greek, Augustine argues, the redundant conjunction probably goes back to the Hebrew source text. This statement indicates his awareness that the ‘proper nature’ (cf. *proprietate*) of Hebrew comprises different criteria for syntactically correct or complete utterances. Likewise, Augustine at 7.30 of the same work—when commenting on *Et si est dominus nobiscum et ut quid inuenierunt nos omnia mala ista?* (Iud. 6:13; cf. Süss

1932: 75)—notes that this sentence ‘has the conjunction *et* superfluously (*plus habet*), as the Bible is wont to phrase it; for if it is taken away (*quae si detrahatur*), the sentence is still complete (*plena sententia est*)’. He subsequently points out that the former conjunction, too, ‘could be taken away while the sentence is still preserved’ (*possit salua sententia detrahi*) and that ‘the usage of our way of speaking (*nostrae locutionis consuetudo*) would require this more’ (cf. *Locutiones in Heptateuchum* 3.4). This comment again shows that to Augustine’s mind, the criteria for syntactic completeness and redundancy are different for Hebrew and for Latin. Several other comments on the redundant use of *et* can be found in the *Locutiones in Heptateuchum* (3.61, 3.62, 4.9, 4.96, 6.5, 7.14, 7.21), but these comments do not contribute any further elements of metalinguistic reflection.

Augustine discusses a second redundancy characteristic of Hebrew and Punic (!) syntax in *Locutiones in Heptateuchum* 1.24. On the verse part *et extendit manum suam* (Gen. 8:9; cf. Süss 1932: 90), he comments that

this is a mode of expression which I think is characteristically Hebrew (*quam ... Hebraeam puto*) because of the fact that it is also very familiar to the Punic language (*quia et Punicae linguae familiarissima est*), in which we discover many things that agree with Hebrew words (*multa ... Hebraeis uerbis consonantia*); for it would certainly have sufficed to say (*nam utique sufficeret*): *et extendit manum*, even if he would not have added (*etsi non adderet*) *suam*.

Here again, Augustine can be seen reflecting on matters of syntax in terms of a complete utterance, the criteria for which depend on the particular language in which the utterance is made. While it is common in Hebrew and Punic to add a possessive pronoun to a noun indicating a part of the body, in Latin this possessive pronoun is not necessary and even superfluous in order to obtain a complete utterance, at least in the case of *sui*-referential phrases. It is also worth pointing out that Augustine in this context refers to the connection between Hebrew and Punic (cf. Süss 1932: 32), and that both the link between these languages (Sect. 7.3, p. 246f.) and his observation on the syntax of these languages are formulated in purely lexical terms.

A third case of perceived redundancy characteristic of Hebrew syntax is discussed by Augustine in *Locutiones in Heptateuchum* 4.110, when he comments on the verses *Et accedentes filii Ruben et filii Gad dixerunt ad Moysen et Eleazar sacerdotem et ad principes synagogae dicentes* (Num. 32:1–2). As regards the accumulation of *dixerunt* and *dicentes*, Augustine remarks: ‘This is not a Greek or a Latin turn of phrase (*non est ista uel Graeca uel Latina locutio*) ...

but it seems to be a Hebrew one (*sed Hebraea uidetur*). The connection of *locutio* with *Graeca*, *Latina* and *Hebraea* suggests that this syntactic peculiarity in Augustine's opinion connects to the 'proper nature' of Hebrew, although nowhere in the *Locutiones* he explicitly posits the existence of an abstract 'proper nature' of a particular language. When Augustine uses the terms *idioma* or *proprietas*, he does so to indicate an individual peculiarity of 'biblical language'.⁷ This is confirmed by a similar statement at 5.31, where Augustine comments on *Si autem auditu audieritis omnia mandata eius, quae ego mando tibi hodie* (Deut. 11:13; cf. Süss 1932: 115). 'Auditu seems to be superfluous (*superfluum*)', he writes, 'but this turn of phrase is very familiar to the holy Bible (*locutio est scripturae sanctae familiarissima*)'.⁸

The second category of relevant observations clusters around cases of perceived **deficiency**. At 2.144 Augustine points out that in the verse *Excide tibi duas tabulas sicut et primae* (Ex. 34:1), the verb *fuerunt* 'is understood' (*subauditur*) and that 'hence our interpreters even believed that it had to be supplemented (*addendum putauerunt*), because such an ellipsis is uncommon in the Latin language (*inusitata est in lingua Latina talis ellipsis*)'. In the Latin Bible verse in point, the utterance remains incomplete as long as the verb *fuerunt* is not supplemented. From a terminological perspective, it is interesting to see that Augustine designates the lacking components by *ellipsis* (cf. above, p. 265) and *subauditur*. The latter term is frequently used throughout the *Locutiones*, and it is undoubtedly due to the Latin tradition of grammars and literary commentaries. A search on *subauditur* in Brepols' *LLT-A* and *LLT-B* databases returns 61 hits in Donatus' works. There are several parallels for this use of the verb in the *Locutiones*, but these parallels do not contribute further elements of metalinguistic reflection (1.45, 1.46, 1.63, 2.93, 2.124, 4.32, 4.33, 4.34, 4.55, 4.64, 4.98).

⁷ Bureau (2001) shows that when Cassiodorus in his *Expositio Psalmorum* uses Augustine's phrase *proprietas uerborum*, it mostly lacks its original linguistic relevance.

⁸ It is worth pointing out that Augustine's opponent Julian of Eclanum, too, concisely comments on this type of redundancy. In *Tractatus prophetarum Osee, Iohel et Amos Os. 1.1* (CCSL 88: 124) he remarks on constructions such as *faciens faciet*, *loquens loquetur*, and *fornicans fornicabitur* that 'this doubling (*ista geminatio*) relates to a peculiarity / the proper nature of the Hebrew language (*ad idioma sermonis Hebrei spectat*)'. Another isolated comment can be identified in the 'Vivarian' *Commentaria in epistulas sancti Pauli 11 Cor. 7* (PL 68: 571A), where a student of Cassiodorus' states that according to some, 'the preposition *sed*' in the place concerned 'is superfluous (*superfluam*) in the Latin text'. However, he argues that 'in the Greek the structure of the utterance has it like this (*structuram habere sermonis*)'.

Augustine makes another observation on a case of deficiency at 4.30, where he comments on the verse *Et abstulit de spiritu qui super ipsum* (Num. 11:25; cf. Süss 1932: 32). He points out that either the verb form *erat* or *erit* is understood (*subauditur*), and that

this mode of expression (*hanc locutionem*)—which is called ellipsis and which is very common (*familiarissimam*) in the Greek and also, in my opinion, in the Hebrew language—the Latin translators did not like to translate, although it is also frequently used (*frequentetur*) in Latin, be it less frequently (*quamuis minus*) than in Greek.

Augustine uses the traditional term *ellipsis* in order to indicate components lacking from a complete utterance. The statement again demonstrates Augustine's awareness that the criteria for a complete utterance vary across different languages. In Augustine's opinion, Hebrew and Greek allow for more 'omissions' than does the Latin language.

Another relevant comment occurs at 2.57; it pertains to Ex. 10:24 (cf. Süss 1932: 122), where Pharaoh says to Moses and Aaron: *ite et seruite domino deo uestro; praeter oves et boues relinquite*. Augustine makes it clear that this is how the Greek text has it, but that it is 'a very unusual way of speaking' (*uale inusitata locutio*) in Latin, 'unless after the sign of punctuation (*distinctio*)'—which should presumably be located in the position of the semicolon in the above quotation—'*relinquite*⁹ is introduced (*inferatur*) and *ista* is understood (*subauditur*)—presumably as the object of the *relinquite* of the original quotation—so that the sense is (*ut sit sensus*): *ite praeter oves et boues et relinquite ista*. Augustine concludes by observing that 'an ellipsis of this kind (*talis ellipsis*) tends to occur frequently (*solet ... fieri crebro*) in ways of speaking proper to the Bible (*in locutionibus scripturarum*)'. Likewise, at 1.47, Augustine deals with the ellipsis at Gen. 14:13, in the phrase *quidam Amoris fratris Excel et fratris Aunan*. He points out that it is not said expressly how *quidam ... Excel* stands to *fratris* (*non dictum est, quid fratris*), but explains that 'the son of his brother' should be understood (*sed intellegitur filius*). Augustine generalizes his observation by stating that 'there are many such ways of speaking in the Bible (*multae sunt tales locutiones scripturarum*), where *filius* is suppressed but understood (*tacetur et intellegitur*)'.

9 This is the reading of the CCSL edition (33: 411), and there are no alternatives for *relinquite* in the critical apparatus. However, Augustine's statement in my opinion only makes sense if we read *ite* here instead of *relinquite*.

An extensive passage of syntactic interest—which in a way involves both deficiency and redundancy—can be found at 2.127, including Augustine's comments on Ex. 30:12–13 (cf. Süss 1932: 24), *Si acceperis computationem filiorum Israhel in uisitatione eorum et dabunt singuli redemptionem animae suaे domino et non erit in eis ruina in uisitatione eorum et hoc est quod dabunt tibi.* Augustine points out that

this utterance remains suspended (*pendet ista locutio*), because a copulative conjunction is inserted (*quia interposita est coniunctio copulativa*); and if this conjunction would not have been inserted (*quae si non interponeretur*), the utterance would not remain suspended (*non penderet*).

He moves on to explain that this conjunction 'is used (*posita*) in three places, and if it is removed (*detracta*) from whatever of these three places, it makes that the sentence is complete (*plenam facit esse sententiam*)'. Augustine goes on to spell out the respective alternatives. The first alternative involves that if the author would have written *dabunt* instead of *et dabunt*, 'the sentence would be completed and would not remain suspended' (*finiretur sententia nec penderet*). The second alternative comprises that if the conjunction is maintained in front of *dabunt*, it should be removed further on (*deorsum tollenda est*), namely in front of *hoc est quod dabunt tibi*. Lastly, according to the third alternative, which has Augustine's preference, the conjunction should be removed from the middle of the verse, in *et non erit in eis ruina*. 'If you would take the conjunction away (*si detrahas coniunctionem*)', Augustine writes, 'the sentence will not remain suspended (*non pendebit sententia*)'. He concludes that 'when the same conjunction is put in each of these places it makes the utterance remain suspended (*pendere facit locutionem*)'.

The above passages extensively show Augustine reflecting on matters of syntax in terms of complete utterances. This implies not only that certain required elements can be lacking from a complete sentence, but also that certain elements can be superfluous in a sentence which is already syntactically complete without them. In the context of the *Locutiones in Heptateuchum*, it becomes clear that the criteria for syntactic completeness vary across different languages, in (partly implicit) connection with the 'proper nature' of these respective languages. Accordingly, an element that is required in a correct Hebrew sentence (a complete Hebrew utterance) can be superfluous in its Latin equivalent.

It is also interesting to see that Augustine uses a very specific terminology in indicating syntactically superfluous elements. Apart from the traditional concept of *ellipsis*, attention can be drawn to terminological variations

on the verb forms *pendet*, ‘remains suspended’, and *subauditur* or *intellegitur*, ‘is understood’. This terminological apparatus is due to the tradition of Latin literary commentaries, which tried to supplement and thus to elucidate obscure passages in the works to which they relate. An illustrative example can be found in Donatus’ commentary on Terence’s *Adelphoe* (which was not drafted by Donatus in its current form). There we find the comment on Terence’s words *nihil pote supra* (2.264) that this is an ‘ellipsis out of admiration’ (Ἐλλείψις *per admirationem*), and that ‘either *esse* or *dici* is understood (*subauditur*)’. A use of *pendet* can be identified in the same commentary, where it is stated that in the context concerned, Terence’s *duxī uxorem* (5.867) ‘remains suspended’ (*pendet*), since it should have been phrased more fully as *duxī etiam uxorem*.

Cassiodorus and Isidore on Complete Utterances in Connection to Punctuation

The notion of syntax in terms of a complete utterance also occurs in a very specific context, namely in connection to punctuation (*positura, distinctio*). The specificity of this context is due to the late antique and early medieval practice of reading (sacred) texts out loud, and to the fact that texts were frequently read in unpunctuated versions (Desbordes 1990: 228–229). Readers thus had to be able to find out for themselves when a sentence or utterance was complete, and this competence was an important component of education in monastery schools (e.g. Irvine 1994: 69–74). Desbordes (1990: 230, 239–240) points out that this grammatical task, called *distinguere*, is extensively discussed already by Quintilian (1.8.1, 11.3.35). In this connection, Riché (³1972: 332) quotes Isidore’s *De ecclesiasticis officiis* 2.11.2, where it is stated that whoever reaches the degree of *lector* should be versed in learning and books, and ‘equipped with the knowledge of senses and words’ to the extent that

he is able to perceive in the distinction of sentences (*ut in distinctionibus sententiarum intellegat*) where a unit is completed (*ubifiniatur iunctura*), where an utterance remains suspended (*ubi adhuc pendeat oratio*), and where a sentence is entirely finished (*ubi sententia extrema claudatur*).

This passage is a good illustration of the pragmatic relevance of syntax in terms of ‘complete utterances’ in the sociohistorical context of late antiquity and the early Middle Ages. A more specific comment can be found in *Diff.* 153 (145), where Isidore—on the basis of Cassiodorus’ *Institutiones* 1.15.12 (Codoñer

1992: 354) (cf. below)—tells the difference between the punctuation marks *distinctio* (full stop) and *subdistinctio* (comma) (cf. *Etym.* 2.18.2). He writes that ‘a full stop makes an end to a sentence (*finem sensu facit*), while a comma leaves it suspended (*suspendit*)’. This definition implies that a full stop can only be used when an utterance is felt to be complete.¹⁰ The same practice is reflected in the preface to Cassiodorus’ *De orthographia* (and in *Institutiones* 1.15.12, without specific syntactic interest), where the founder of Vivarium deals with the comma (*subdistinctio*). He states that the comma is used on those places ‘where an utterance is perceived as suspended (*suspensus*) in a division of a period and as calling for suppletion (*adhuc reddendus esse*)’ (*KGL* 7: 146). In other words, the comma is used to indicate that an utterance is not yet finished or complete.

3 Word Order

Due to the upsurge of translation activities in the 4th-century Latin West, the issue of word order in translation provides a prominent clue for contrastive observations with syntactic relevance. Authors with varying degrees of actual translation expertise commonly use the phrase *ordo uerborum* when dealing with this issue (Courcelle² 1948: 42–43; Marti 1974: 70–71). Interestingly, they frequently use the terms *hyperbaton* (Lausberg³ 1990: 357–358 § 716) and *figura* (Lausberg³ 1990: 266–267 § 496) to refer to ‘aberrant’ types of word order. These terms, going back to their Greek equivalents ὑπέρβατον and σχήματα λέξεως, were commonplace in the Latin tradition of grammar and rhetoric. Harking back again to the ‘classic’ voice of Donatus, one can cite the definition of *hyperbaton* in *Ars maior* 3.6—the section on ‘tropes’ or rhetorical figures—as ‘some kind of ‘passing over’ (*transcensio quaedam*) which disturbs the order of words (*uerborum ordinem turbans*)’. An illustrative definition of the figure of speech (σχήμα λέξεως) is provided by Donatus’ contemporary Charisius in his *Ars grammatica* (*KGL* 1: 279): ‘a figure of speech (*schema lexeos*) is a word order shaped differently than it should have been (*ordo uerborum aliter quam debuit figuratus*), for reasons of metre or elegance (*metri aut decoris causa*)’. As can be

¹⁰ An isolated statement with syntactic relevance in terms of a complete utterance occurs in Isidore’s treatment of verbal modes, more specifically the *modus coniunctius*, in *Etym.* 1.9.4: *Coniunctius, quia ei coniungitur aliquid, ut locutio plena sit. Nam quando dicis ‘cum clamem’, pendet sensus; quod si dicam ‘cum clamem, quare putas quod taceam?’ plenus est sensus.* Cf. Audax, *Excerpta de Scauri et Palladii libris* (*KGL* 7: 344) (Collart 1978c: 202).

seen from both definitions, the concepts and terms of *hyperbaton* and *figura* lend themselves particularly well for the interpretation and designation of issues of word order. Because of its more intimate connection with ‘complete utterances’, the concept of *ellipsis* has already been introduced by means of Donatus’ definition in Sect. 8.2 (p. 265).

Jerome makes brief contrastive observations on the issue of word order in *Ep. 112.19.1*, where he states that in his translations from Greek and Hebrew, his strategy consisted in rendering what he understood, ‘in the mean time preserving (*interdum ... conseruant*) the truth of meanings rather than the sequence of words (*sensuum potius ueritatem quam uerborum ... ordinem*)’. This statement implies that Jerome is aware (1) that a ‘correct’ or ‘natural’ word order varies across different languages, and (2) that the word order of a Latin sentence has a certain significance for natives of Latin. However, he judges the significance of word order subordinate to the preservation of meaning in his translation. The issue is also touched upon in *Ep. 57*, which is in fact a treatise ‘on the best way of translating’ (*de optimo genere interpretandi*) (Bartelink 1976b, 1980; Berschin 1980: 67; cf. Antin 1968). Jerome states in § 5.2 that in his translations from Greek

except in the case of the holy Bible, where even the order of words is a mystery (*ubi et uerborum ordo mysterium est*)—I render not word for word, but sense for sense (*non uerbum e uerbo, sed sensum exprimere de sensu*).

This statement shows that in Jerome’s opinion, the biblical text is sacrosanct, even on the level of word order. This might be taken to suggest that the syntactic level was not normally a very prominent one to Jerome and his contemporaries—one possible explanation for this being that word order in Latin is relatively loose. In addition, it might be observed from the above quotation that the practice of Bible translation made native speakers of Latin more strongly aware of possible problematic aspects of word order than they had been before. In the same letter, at § 5.6–8, Jerome quotes the preface to his translation of Eusebius of Caesarea’s *Chronicon*, which was concerned—among other things—with the difficulties involved with translation from Greek into Latin (cf. Rebenich 2002: 75–78). In his enumeration of difficulties, Jerome touches on the issue of word order, which he discusses by means of traditional grammatical and stylistic terms. ‘Add to this’, he writes,

the intricacies of hyperbata (*hyperbatorum anfractus*), the differences in case (*dissimilitudines casuum*), the varieties in figures (*uarietates figu-*

rarum), and lastly the very peculiar and, so to say, vernacular ['home-born'] nature of the language (*ipsum ... suum et ... uernaculum linguae genus*).

Jerome thus explicitly states that differences of word order relate to the 'proper nature' of each language. The traditional categories which Jerome uses in interpreting the syntactic issue of word order are *hyperbaton* and *figura* (cf. above). It is worth pointing out that with these are bracketed together issues of case and agreement (*dissimilitudines casuum*), which in the language system of Latin and Greek play a prominent role in matters of syntax. Jerome moves on by writing that 'if anyone does not believe that the elegance of language is not altered by translation', he should translate Homer word for word into Latin, or even into Latin prose. Then he will see 'that the [resulting] word order is ridiculous (*ordinem ridiculum*) and that the so very eloquent poet barely even speaks'. This statement implies that a 'normal' or 'intuitive' word order varies from language to language. It should probably be understood that Jerome handles word order loosely in the process of translation, in order to make it agree to the 'proper nature' of the target language, though more carefully so in the case of Bible translation.

With regard to the issue of word order in the context of Bible translation, Jerome points out in *Commentarii in Isaiam* 3.7.14 that when quoting from the Old Testament, the evangelists and the apostles followed not the order of the words (*uerborum ordo*), but their meaning, and that 'hence in the present passage, Matthew put *in utero habebit* instead of *concipiet in utero*'. It should be noted that the approach ascribed to the evangelists and the apostles agrees to the practice which Jerome claims to follow himself. Word order is also at issue in *Commentarii in Isaiam* 15.57.1/2:

As to what is said according to the Hebrew text, *Veniat pax, requiescat in cubili suo; ambulet in directione sua*, the meaning is indeed clear, but the succession of words (*uerborum consequentia*), which stands in the idiom of its own language (*quae in suae linguae stat idiomate*), looks confused in our language (*apud nos uidetur esse turbata*).

This passage strongly suggests that an intuitively 'right' word order varies across different languages, in direct connection to the 'idiom' or 'proper nature' of each particular language (cf. *in suae linguae ... idiomate*). When a Latin sentence follows the word order of its Hebrew source text, this makes a 'confused' impression on a native speaker of Latin. Jerome's statement should presumably be read as an implicit critique of the Latin Bible translators preceding him, i.e.

those who produced the *Veteres Latinae*. These translators usually proceeded very literally and respected the Greek word order, which often ran counter to the intuition of a native speaker of Latin.

Like Jerome, Augustine too comments on the issue of word order in the contrastive framework of his *Locutiones in Heptateuchum* (Sect. 8.2, p. 267f.).¹¹ At 1.47 he notes on the verse *Adueniens autem eorum qui euaserunt quidam nuntiauit Abraham transfluuiali—ipse autem habitabat ad querum Mambre—Amoris fratris Excol et fratris Aunan qui erant coniurati Abraham* (Gen. 14:13) that this is ‘an obscure hyperbaton’ (*obscurum hyperbaton*). In order to elucidate this difficult passage, he proposes a different word order (*ordo est enim ...*), which is supposedly closer to an intuitive word order for a native speaker of Latin.¹² In *Locutiones in Heptateuchum* 1.187 Augustine comments on the odd word order of the verse *Quomodo autem ascendam ad patrem, cum puer non sit nobiscum? Vt non uideam mala, quae inuenient patrem meum!* (Gen. 44:34). He proposes alternative constructions of the verse which correspond more closely to the word order confirmed by ‘usage’ in Latin. Interestingly, he introduces his alternatives by writing that ‘the usual way of speaking (*consuetudo loquendi*) rather required to say (*magis ... exigebat dici*) ...’ and that ‘the usual word order (*usitatus ordo ... uerborum*) is as follows ...’.¹³ There is a possibility that Augustine’s problem is primarily with the presence of *non* in *ut non uideam* and with how this corresponds to *quomodo* at the beginning of the verse. In that case, *usitatus ordo ... uerborum* would be used here in a broader sense, with the approximate meaning of ‘the usual phrasing’.

A remark on the issue of word order can also be found in Isidore’s comment on hyperbata in *Etym.* 2.20.2, which is part of a section entitled *De iuncturis uerborum*. Isidore advises that ‘one should also avoid hyperbata that are too far extended (*hyperbata longiora*), which cannot be employed without confusion with other meanings (*sine aliorum sensuum confusione*)’. This advice shows that even in Latin, where case is supposedly more important than word order in indicating syntactic coherence, there is felt to be a (lexico-semantic) limit to

¹¹ It should be noted that Augustine also ‘rearranges’ individual Bible quotations in exegetical works which have only an indirect link with the context of translation. In these cases, Augustine’s approach is (even more) *ad hoc* and lacks a contrastive dimension.

¹² In full, Augustine’s alternative reads as follows: *Ordo est enim: Adueniens eorum qui euaserunt quidam Amoris fratris Excol et fratris Aunan, qui erant coniurati, nuntiauit Abraham transfluuiali; ipse autem habitabat ad querum.*

¹³ In full, the alternative reads as follows: *Sic enim usitatus ordo iste uerborum est: Non ascendam ad patrem, cum puer non sit nobiscum, ut non uideam mala, quae inuenient patrem meum.*

the separation of syntactically connected components. The stylistic potential of hyperbaton ends where syntactic confusion begins.

4 Conjunctions

An obvious context to look for early Christian Latin authors' views on syntactic issues are the passages where they comment on the conjunction as one of the parts of speech. By its very nature, the conjunction connects words or word clusters to form a sentence. Because of the evident syntactic relevance of this context, Baratin (1989: 15–114) chooses the conjunction as the subject matter for the prologue to his *La naissance de la syntaxe à Rome*. He points out (1989: 17) that the existence of the conjunction was already an established fact in the earliest Latin linguistic texts which have come down to us. He furthermore observes that in order to denote the conjunction, Varro in his *De lingua Latina* uses the term *copula* (8.3.10) next to *pars iungendi* and, according to a fragment preserved by Charisius (*KGL* 1: 73) also *coniunctio*, a loan translation of the Greek term σύνδεσμος. Still according to Baratin, Quintilian preferred *conuinctio* (< *conuincire*, 'to bind tightly') although he recognized that *coniunctio* was supported by tradition (1.4.18), and it was the latter term which in the end made it throughout the Latin grammatical tradition. Indeed, we see that Donatus integrates a chapter *De coniunctione* in his *Ars maior* (2.15), which he introduces by defining the conjunction as 'the part of speech (*pars orationis*) which ties in and organizes the sentence (*adnectens ordinansque sententiam*)'.

Augustine's comments on the characteristically 'biblical' redundant usage of *et* in *Locutiones in Heptateuchum* have been discussed in Section 8.2 above (p. 267f.). Other syntactically relevant statements on conjunctions, occurring in the works of Ambrose and Isidore, will be discussed in the present section. Ambrose makes an isolated remark on the issue in *Expositio Psalmi cxviii* 18.33, when discussing the 'force' of the Latin conjunction *et* in order to demonstrate that the phrase *iuuenis ego sum et despectus* (Ps. 118:141) is not the same as *iuuenis sum despectus*. It should be noted that here again, the observation is situated on the word level and relates to semantic issues, whereas syntactic criteria are clearly involved. Ambrose argues that although grammarians call *et* the 'connective syllable' (*syllaba ... coniunctiua*), 'it also encloses a distinction (*distinctionem*), by which a combination (*confusio*) can be divided and separated (*disiungitur ac separatur*)'. By way of example, he states that with *Ambrosius Bassus* one person is understood, while with *Ambrosius et Bassus* two are understood. A possible source, or rather a possible indication of a broader usage of the phrase *syllaba coniunctiua* can be identified in the contemporary

grammarian Diomedes' *Ars grammatica* (KGL 1: 499). There it is explained that 'unyoked' verses (*iniuges*, ἀσύνδετοι) are verses 'which are not joined by any connective syllable' (*qui nulla coniunctionis syllaba copulantur*).

The syntactic characteristics of conjunctions are a relatively prominent topic in Isidore's works. Isidore devotes a separate section to the conjunction in *Etym.* 1.12.1–4. His etymological definition of the term *coniunctio* is very significant from a syntactic point of view. A conjunction, he explains, 'is so called because it joins together (*coniungat*) meanings and phrases (*sensus sententiasque*)'. Isidore furthermore argues that while a conjunction has no meaning on its own (*per se nihil ualeat*), 'it presents as it were a certain glue (*quasi quoddam ... glutinum*) in the joining together of words (*in copulatione sermonum*)'. Isidore explains that conjunctions can join together either nouns or verbs, and states that they 'all share a single power' (*una ... uis omnium*), namely 'either they join (*copulent*), or they disjoin (*disiungant*)'. Fontaine (1959: 110 with n. 1) points out that the first part of Isidore's definition is based on 'Sergius'/Servius, *Explanationes in artem Donati* (KGL 4: 516), while the grammatical use of *copulatio* is frequent in Quintilian and the imagery of 'glue' might be reminiscent of Jerome's *Commentarii in epistulas Paulinas* Gal. 2.4.19 (CCSL 77A: 131) and Eph. 2.4.16 (*quodam glutino*). With regard to the latter parallel, I would like to add that the phrase also occurs in Ambrose's *De Noe* 7.19, but that neither in Jerome's commentary nor in Ambrose's tractate the phrase has anything to do with conjunctions or syntax.

Perhaps a more interesting analogy can be identified in a work entitled *Peri hermeneias* or *De interpretatione* which was attributed by Cassiodorus, *Inst.* 2.3.12 (Mynors 1937: 118)—possibly rightly so—to the philosopher Apuleius (125–180 AD). In § 4 the author of this work explains that according to some philosophers, a complete proposition consists of only two parts of speech, namely a noun and a verb. The author furthermore explains that with regard to adverbs, pronouns, participles, conjunctions and the like, these philosophers hold that

these are not parts of speech to a higher degree (*non magis partes orationis esse*) than decorated sterns of ships and the hairs of men (*quam nauium aplustria et hominum pilos*), or certainly in the global structure of the utterance (*in uniuersa compage orationis*) they are to be considered nails and bitumen and glue (*uice clauorum et picis et glutinis deputanda*).

While in this passage, the imagery of 'glue' is used next to 'nails' and 'bitumen' to demonstrate the limited value of any part of speech other than the noun and the verb, the category of conjunction is explicitly involved. Without wanting

to argue that Isidore knew this work and relied on it directly or indirectly—which is not impossible given the fact that Cassiodorus knew it—I would like to conclude that there may have been more relevant (grammatical and dialectic) sources for Isidore's use of *glutinum* in connection to conjunctions than the passages in Jerome's commentary which are quoted by Fontaine. With regard to Isidore's posterity, it can be pointed out, incidentally, that the 7th-century Irish 'anonymus ad Cuimnanum' (cf. Irvine 1994: 280) states in his *Expositio Latinitatis* 22 that 'someone among the authors (*quidam auctorum*) has called the conjunction the glue of words (*coniunctionem ... uocauit glutinum sermonum*'); for it glues together phrases and connects them (*conglutinat enim sententias et conectit*)'. Holtz (1981: 284) points out that Isidore's *Etymologiae* started to circulate in Ireland only by the end of the 7th century, but *Etym.* 1.12.1 is the only passage indicated by Bischoff & Löfstedt in the *apparatus fontium* to the relevant passage of *Expositio Latinitatis* (CCSL 113D: 148).

Still in his section on the conjunction (as above, 1.12.1–4), Isidore subsequently moves on to distinguish 7 types of conjunctions—'copulative' (*et*), 'disjunctive' (*aut*), 'subjoined' (-*que*), 'expletive' (*saltim*), 'common' (*igitur*), 'causal' (*quia*), and 'rational' (*ne*). This classification undoubtedly goes back—probably through the filter of the commentators on Donatus—to Donatus' *Ars maior* 2.15. In Donatus' relevant section, conjunctions are classified along their five types or *species* (copulative, disjunctive, expletive, causal, and rational), and along their position or *ordo* (prepositive, subjoined, common). In Isidore's classification, both categories are lumped together and the class of prepositive conjunctions is left out. Due to the sources relied upon, connective capacity and word order (Sect. 8.3, p. 275f.) are important distinctive criteria in Isidore's classification (cf. Fontaine 1959: 110). Copulative conjunctions are said to be called so 'because they join (*coniungant*) meaning or persons'¹⁴ and disjunctive conjunctions 'because they disjoin (*disiungant*) things or persons'.¹⁵ Subjoined conjunctions are so called 'because they are attached behind (*subiunguntur*)', and expletive conjunctions 'because they fill out (*explent*) the topic proposed (*propositam rem*)'.¹⁶ In the last of relevant definitions, Isidore explains that common conjunctions are so called 'because they can be placed anywhere (*ubiuis ponuntur*)'.¹⁷ As is clear from these cases, a couple of syntactic criteria are explicitly connected to semantic and discursive criteria in the categorization and definition of conjunctions.

¹⁴ As in *Ego et tu eamus ad forum*.

¹⁵ As in *Ego aut tu faciamus*.

¹⁶ As in *Si hoc non uis, saltim illud fac*.

¹⁷ As in *Igitur hoc faciam next to Hoc igitur faciam*.

Other interesting comments can be found in *Diff.* 285 (479), where Isidore tells the difference between the conjunctions *quoniam* and *quia* (no source indicated by Codoñer 1992: 377). He does not explicitly qualify these words as ‘conjunctions’, but points out that *quoniam* ‘is put in front (*praeponitur*) and in this way establishes a relation with the meaning of what follows (*sequentem sensum alligat*)’—e.g. *Quoniam dicis, dico*—while *quia* ‘is put in the back (*postponitur*) and confirms the meaning of what precedes (*superiorem sensum confirmat*)’—e.g. *Scias quia didici*. First, this definition involves an obvious sense of word order (Sect. 8.3, p. 275f.), since the very difference between *quoniam* and *quia* consists in the place occupied by the conjunction in relation to the verb. Second, this definition reveals an awareness of the ‘connective’ capacity of conjunctions. The conjunction *quoniam* is said to ‘tie in’ or to ‘connect’ the subsequent sentence to the preceding verb. In *Diff.* 407 (592) Isidore points out very concisely that *-ue* ‘is disjunctive’ (*distinguit*), while *-que* ‘is conjunctive’ (*coniungit*) (no unique source indicated by Codoñer 1992: 400). While it may be argued that the criterion for this distinction is logical rather than actually ‘syntactic’, the syntactic significance is obvious in *Diff.* 408 (593), where Isidore tells the difference between *-ue* and *uae*, which in his days were apparently pronounced in the same way (cf. Fontaine 1959: 86). He points out that *uae* with an *a* is an interjection of grief, but *ue* without an *a* a connective conjunction (*coniunctio subiunctiua*). As Codoñer (1992: 401) indicates, this entry is based on Agroecius’ *De orthographia* (KGL 7: 114). These two definitions make it clear that to Isidore—and probably to most authors working in the same grammatical tradition—conjunctions such as *-ue* and *-que* have the particular function of joining other individual words together.

5 Solecism

A group of statements with syntactic relevance, which can be regarded as a ‘special case’ of the notion of syntax as ‘joining words to form a sentence’ (Sect. 8.1, p. 261f.), clusters around the traditional grammatical concept and term of ‘solecism’, *soloecismus*, going back to the Greek σολοικισμός (Baratin 1989: 257–322). The fact that Latin grammarians could easily use *soloecismus* as a catch-all term to indicate various forms of ‘abnormal’ or ‘incorrect’ connections of words has been interpreted—rightly in my opinion—as one of the reasons why it took so long for the Latin grammatical tradition to develop a systematic approach of syntax (Flobert 1986; Schenkeveld 2000; Swiggers & Wouters 2003b: 36–37). The ‘elastic’ character of *soloecismus* can be seen from Donatus’ *Ars maior* 3.2, where it is defined as ‘the error (*uitium*) which consists in a connection

of parts of speech (*in contextu partium orationis*) which runs counter to the rules of grammar (*contra regulam artis grammaticae*)' (cf. Holtz 1981: 140–141). Different but often equally general definitions of *soloecismus* can be found in other grammars (Sacerdos, Charisius, Diomedes) and in the commentaries on Donatus (Servius, Pompeius, 'Sergius') (cf. Baratin 1989: 261 with n. 1). It is important to note that many phenomena covered by *soloecismus* involve the factors of case and agreement.

In early Christian Latin literature, the grammatical concept of *soloecismus* was discussed in a relativizing and ironical way by Augustine, who asks in *De doctrina Christiana* 2.13.19 how 'a so-called solecism' can else be defined than what happens 'when words are not joined to each other according to the same law (*cum uerba non ea lege sibi coaptantur*)', by which people who spoke with some authority before us joined them' (cf. Schirner 2015: 34). This statement is a clear manifestation of the attitude that the message of Christianity (the 'word of God') should not be subjected to the rules of grammar (Ch. 4, p. 122f.). It should be noted that this specific statement involves an explicit relativization of the sanctioning factor of *usus* or *consuetudo*, as the intuition of the native speaker combined with the authority of 'the best authors'. In spite of the irony displayed in *De doctrina Christiana*, Augustine repeatedly uses *soloecismus* in the established way in his *Locutiones in Heptateuchum*. Due to the purpose and scope of the *Locutiones* (Sect. 8.2, p. 267f.), the term repeatedly occurs in contrastive observations with syntactic relevance. One instance is found in *Locutiones in Heptateuchum* 2.121, where Augustine comments on the verse *Et sumet Aaron nomina filiorum Israhel super rationale iudicii super pectus introeunti in sanctum* (Ex. 28:29) (cf. Schirner 2015: 96–97). With regard to the odd correspondence between *Aaron* and *introeunti*, Augustine states that 'it would have been consistent (*consequens erat*) to say *introiens in sanctum*, that is *sumet Aaron introiens*', and points out that 'some Latin versions have translated it in this way in order to avoid a solecism (*soloecismum uitantes*)'. He subsequently notes that in his opinion, this phrase is a biblical *locutio* rather than an error, and acknowledges that because the Greek version has the equivalent of *introeunti* and some Latin versions follow it, he chose to draw attention to this turn of phrase instead of correcting it (*locutionem potius notandam credidi quam corrigendam*). This means that Augustine *de facto* opts to maintain the 'solecism', since the biblical text cannot contain actual errors, but simply wants to render the passage concerned intelligible for his fellow Latin Christians.

From a different, more technical perspective, relevant observations can also be found in book 1 of Isidore's *Etymologiae*. In *Etym.* 1.34.1–3 the encyclopaedist ranges the solecism (*soloecismus*) under the heading of grammatical 'faults'

(*uitia*). He points out that while a barbarism is ‘the corruption of a single word’, a solecism ‘is a faulty composition of words’ (*compositio uitiosa uerborum*). Isidore enters into more detail in 1.33.1–2. By combining material from Donatus and from Augustine (Irvine 1994: 225), he there defines a solecism as ‘an unsuitable composition (*inconueniens compositio*) of several words to each other (*plurimorum uerborum inter se*)’, in the same way as a barbarism is the corruption of a single word. Fontaine (1959: 130–131 n. 1) points out that the definition given by Isidore diverges from, and is more precise than Donatus’ and Servius’ (and Pompeius’) *uitium factum in contextu partium orationis*. He furthermore suggests that Isidore’s definition is probably a direct adaptation of Quintilian’s *sequentium ac priorum inter se inconueniens positio* (1.5.51). When Isidore moves on to phrase this definition differently and to give a couple of examples, it becomes clear that in his conception, the correctness (or error) in construction depends to a significant degree on the usage of case. A solecism is now defined as ‘a group of words that are not joined by the correct rule’ (*uerba ... non recta lege coniuncta*), as is for instance the case in *inter nobis* for *inter nos*, or in *date ueniam sceleratorum* for *date ueniam sceleratis*. In the same connection, Isidore points out at 1.35.7 that between the solecism and the *schema*, which he defines as ‘a faultless binding together of words’ (*perfectam sermonum conexionem*), there exists a third possibility, namely the *figura*, which according to Isidore ‘occurs by the joining together of words (*contextu sermonum*) in a faulty utterance (*oratione uitiosa*)’.¹⁸

Summary

With Swiggers & Wouters (2003b: 36) I have emphasized in the introduction to this chapter (p. 259) that ‘the ancients’ in any case lacked a systematic discussion of syntactic reflection, and possibly even a notion of ‘syntax’ as such. However, maintaining a broad definition of syntax, I hope to have shown that early Christian Latin authors did reflect on linguistic patterns and structures which are situated on the level of the sentence. From the scattered and indirect textual evidence, I have tried to reconstruct the authors’ views on matters of syntax by focusing on two general research questions and three more specific ‘clues’. In the first section I have dealt with those passages where early Christian

¹⁸ In the grammatical tradition, the distinction between *schema*, *figura* and *soloecismus* is in fact a matter of degree; whereas *schema* designates a correct structural combination, *figura* indicates a tolerated deviation in the combination of words (often in authoritative writers), and *soloecismus* simply an incorrect construction.

Latin authors reflect on syntactic matters in terms of ‘joining words to form sentences’, one of the most basic conceptions a language user can have of syntax. This notion turns up obliquely in one of Jerome’s Old Testament commentaries, and more clearly and extensively in the grammatical section of Isidore’s *Etymologiae*. Isidore defines an utterance as a ‘connection of words’, and—drawing on the grammatical tradition—categorizes different parts of speech with reference to how they are connected to other words or parts of speech within the boundaries of a sentence.

In the second section I have turned to those places where the authors are seen reflecting on matters of syntax by conceiving of a correct sentence as a ‘complete utterance’. Relatively frequently, early Christian Latin authors comment on sentences that are either incomplete or contain superfluous elements. It has been shown that this approach relies on a specific kind of ‘syntax’ in the grammatical tradition which goes back to the formal analysis of language in Stoic dialectic. The authors included in the corpus do not systematically deal with the criterion defining whether an utterance is complete or not, but the decisive factor appears to be the ‘proper nature’ of a language, i.e. the intuition of the native speaker. When explicit reference is made to criteria such as *euphonía* and *usus*, these should presumably be understood as vague expressions of this native speaker intuition (amounting to the English expressions ‘this sentence does not sound well’, ‘this sentence does not run properly’, and ‘this construction is unusual’). Most interestingly, it is in their discussions of specific Bible passages translated from Hebrew or Greek into Latin that Jerome and Augustine deal with cases of redundancy and deficiency. This means that they always formulate their comments on an *ad hoc* basis, but also that these comments obtain a contrastive dimension. Both authors are aware that the (intuitive) criteria for a complete utterance differ along with the language at issue. In Augustine’s approach, which is remarkably independent with regard to Jerome, the different criteria for completeness belong to the specific *locutiones* of Hebrew or ‘biblical language’ in general. In connection with punctuation, comments based on the assumption that a correct sentence is a complete utterance have also been identified in the works of Cassiodorus and of Isidore.

Turning to the three smaller ‘clues’, I have looked in the third section at the authors’ discussions on word order as possible contexts for comments on matters of syntax. As could be expected, the practice of Bible translation provided an important background for this section. When Jerome takes a particular stand with regard to whether or not one should maintain the word order of the source text in a good translation—with explicit reference to the *idioma* of the languages involved—this certainly implies that in his opinion, the intuitive norms for a ‘correct’ word order vary across different languages.

The same holds true for Augustine, who prefers the term *locutio* and refers to the usage valid for a particular language. It is important to note that both Jerome and Augustine use traditional stylistic terms (*hyperbaton*, *figura*) in order to identify an uncommon word order.

In the fourth section I have looked at a number of passages where syntactic issues come in when authors discuss conjunctions, which precisely have the function of joining words together. Apart from an isolated remark made by Ambrose, it is primarily Isidore who deals extensively with the appropriate place and the connective capacity of conjunctions. In the fifth section, lastly, I have explored a number of passages where syntactic issues are discussed under the heading of ‘solecism’. While the concept is discussed to considerable extent by Isidore, it is used by Augustine to indicate a counterintuitive (i.e. contrary to *consuetudo*) word order in Latin due to the biblical subtext. While all of the sections show that early Christian Latin authors did reflect on matters of syntax, their dependence on traditional grammatical or stylistic terms such as *soloecismus*, *ellipsis*, *hyperbaton* and *figura* is strongly supportive of Swiggers & Wouters’ argument (2003b) that syntactic reflection in antiquity was ‘surreptitious’ in nature (cf. above, p. 259).

The Word Level

Having dealt with early Christian Latin authors' linguistic observations on the language level (Ch. 7, p. 223f.) and on the sentence level (Ch. 8, p. 259f.), I will now proceed to discuss their linguistic observations on the word level. More precisely, the present chapter deals with the authors' observations relating to matters of lexico-semantics and morphology, but also of pragmatics and phonetics (cf. below on *permutatio litterarum*). Among the four chapters of which Part 3 of this study consists, the present chapter is probably the one which corresponds best to early Christian Latin authors' own—albeit mostly implicit—concept(ualization) of linguistic description. Indeed, one could say that the 'hypotrophy' of syntax which has become evident in the previous chapter can be explained with reference to a 'hypertrophy' of morphology (cf. Desbordes 1990: 279). Since words are the entities to which morphological characteristics apply or 'adhere', it appears that for ancient language users, words are the primary units of linguistic description. Again, the practice of (Bible) translation constitutes an important background for the authors' relevant (contrastive) observations.

Due to the authors' reliance on *permutatio litterarum*, the alteration of *letters*, in describing linguistic change (cf. below, p. 292f.), there is an intimate connection between the present chapter on the one hand and Chapter 10—which deals with linguistic observations on the letter level—on the other. However, because the authors seem to believe that when a language changes, it is actually the words it consists of that change (Uhlfelder 1963: 27–28; Müller 2003: 201), it seems the most appropriate choice to discuss their views on linguistic change in the present chapter. It is important to single out the pervasive influence exerted by the Roman polymath Varro (116–27 BC) on the Latin tradition of linguistic description, especially but not exclusively on the level of words. The first triad of *De lingua Latina*, which includes book 4, concerned with etymology, is irreparably lost (de Poerck 1970: 204). However, the etymological formulas of *De lingua Latina* are repeated over and again by later Latin authors, who mostly draw on the work indirectly and without acknowledging their debt, possibly because they are simply unaware of it (Collart 1954: 346; cf. Collart 1978b: 19). Among early Christian Latin authors it is most of all Lactantius, Augustine, Cassiodorus, and Isidore of Seville who draw on Varro's etymological works (Opelt 1965: 812). Collart (1978b: 19) even states that the etymological questions which are treated extensively by Varro ultimately led to the *Etymologiae* of Isidore of Seville.

The above elements help to set the global stage for the present chapter, but the respective sections will also be introduced separately. In order to come to grips with early Christian Latin authors' linguistic observations on the word level, this chapter will investigate (1) how the authors deal with linguistic change (i.e. word evolution) and go about linguistic reconstruction, (2) how they deal with 'exotic' (foreign and obsolete) words, and (3) to what extent and for which purposes they formulate linguistic observations on the word level from a 'contrastive' point of view.

1 Linguistic Change

Awareness of Linguistic Change in Ancient Thought

First of all, it needs to be established to what extent people in antiquity were aware of the fact that language changes. With reference to 'the Romans' specifically, Uhlfelder (1963: 24) states that they 'knew that the language which they spoke and read and wrote differed in a number of ways from the language of their ancestors'. For this general awareness of linguistic change in antiquity, some more concrete evidence can be cited. Varro throughout *De lingua Latina* pays specific attention to words which are used by the *antiqui* or *ueteres* and which strike him as different from how they are written in his own days (Müller 2003: 200–201; cf. Müller 2005: 17). Moreover, at 5.1.10 Varro makes a distinction between words (*uerba*) which are 'either our own (*nossa*) or foreign (*aliena*) or obsolete (*obliuia*) ones'. Cicero (*De oratore* 3.12.45, *Brutus* 58.211)—like Plato (*Cratylus* 418b–c)—observes that women are generally more conservative with regard to their speech, i.e. less eager to adopt linguistic innovations (Müller 2003: 209). One can also single out Quintilian's general observation in *Institutio oratoria* (8.3.26)—in the context of the conformity of 'proper words' to a particular register of style—that 'almost the whole language has changed' (*totus prope mutatus est sermo*) (Müller 2003: 196).

It is crucial to point out with Müller (2003: 202) that in ancient thought, the topic of linguistic change owes its relevance to the recurrent belief that the original, 'correct' or 'uncorrupted' form of a word was also its ontologically most revealing form, i.e. the form which tells most about the essence of its referent (cf. the debate on the πρῶτα ὀνόματα and the ὀρθότης τῶν ὀνομάτων in Plato's *Cratylus*; Sect. 1.1, p. 44). Thus, the general philosophical desire to understand the essence of things made it relevant to consider that words change, and to find ways to reconstruct their original forms. In linguistic practice, this materialized in the devices of *etymologia* and of *permutatio litterarum*,

which could help to find out—in Varro's words (*De lingua Latina* 5.1.2)—*cur et unde sint uerba* (cf. Müller 2003: 205). These devices will be introduced extensively below. Another important general observation is that the diachronic perspective in ancient linguistic thought is very vague (Müller 2003: 203). When ancient authors comment on cases of linguistic change, they generally distinguish only between 'new' and 'old' or between 'now' and 'then' (cf. Müller 2005: 18). Just sometimes, they are somewhat more specific by associating a particular earlier stage of language (a particular word form) with a particular ancient author, or with the first namegiver.

Ancient Thought on Causes for Linguistic Change

Müller (2003: 214, 219) distinguishes a number of possible explanations for linguistic change in ancient thought. In doing so, he draws a neat distinction between what he calls *Inhärenztheorie*—the belief that language is inherently and continuously in decay—and what he calls *Abnutzungstheorie*—the belief that language degenerates by being used. It seems right to hold with Müller (2003: 211) that in ancient thought, linguistic change is mostly understood in terms of linguistic corruption or degeneration. However, the dividing line between the 'theories' mentioned is probably not as neat as Müller suggests. In my opinion, the important point for the discussion of early Christian Latin authors' views on linguistic change is that 'time' or 'the lapse of time' is often attributed an actual explanatory (causal) value (cf. Müller 2003: 203). Following Müller, one can cite a number of illustrative instances in 'pagan' Greek and Latin literature. In Plato's *Cratylus*, Socrates argues at 414c (and 419d) that words (names) change 'with the lapse of time' (ὑπὸ χρόνου). Cicero states in *Brutus* 74.258 that in earlier times, practically every orator spoke Latin correctly, but that 'lapse of time (*uetustas*) has brought about some deterioration in this respect (*hanc ... rem deteriorem ... fecit*) both at Rome and in Greece'. Likewise, Varro states in *De lingua Latina* 5.1.5 that 'there are few things which lapse of time does not distort (*uetustas pauca non deprauat*), and there are many which it removes (*multa tollit*)'. Interestingly, Varro compares this situation with the vanishing beauty of a boy who gradually grows old. Müller rightly notes that Varro's comparison anticipates the metaphor of organic life in discussions of linguistic change.¹ In ancient Latin literature, this

¹ This metaphor, which is indicated as *Lebensaltervergleich* or *der anthropomorphe Kulturspekt* by Häussler (1964: 313), has played a prominent part throughout the history of linguistic ideas (cf. e.g. Percival 1987a; Labov 2001: 6–10), and reached its summit in the 'organic' or 'biological' imagery of 19th-century comparativism, with Schleicher (1821–1868) as one of its foremost representatives.

metaphor is voiced most explicitly by Horace in *Ars poetica* 68–72, where it is connected to *usus* as the primary criterion for the correctness or sanctioning of speech.²

A different explanation for linguistic change which Müller mentions is the criterion of euphony (cf. Herescu 1948). This criterion most likely goes back to the rhetorical tradition (Lausberg 3¹⁹⁹⁰: 279 §524), and can be regarded as a conscious human ‘countermove’ against the perceived decay of language. Müller refers to a number of passages in Plato’s *Cratylus*, where euphony and related criteria such as ‘elegance’ are presented not so much as causes, but as purposes of linguistic change.³ In the Latin tradition, a relevant comment can be identified in Quintilian 1.5.4, where it is argued that ‘the only detectable virtue’ of an individual word ‘is euphony (*uocalitas*), which is called εὐφωνία’ (cf. Lausberg 3¹⁹⁹⁰: 279 §524). An illustrative example of the criterion of euphony in ancient thought on linguistic change is the case of *medicies* altering into *meridies* (cf. below, p. 295, and Denecker forthc.d).

As was already indicated above, two concepts are crucial for the ancient description and analytical explanation of linguistic change, namely *etymologia* and *permutatio litterarum*. I will introduce these concepts in what follows. Although I devote a separate subsection to both of them, it should be emphasized that they are not on the same level. The operations of *permutatio litterarum* should actually be considered the individual techniques used in the general practice of *etymologia*.

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- 2 The passage concerned reads as follows: ‘All mortal things will perish (*mortalia facta peribunt*), / and much less will the glory and glamour of speech endure and live (*nedum sermonum stet honos et gratia uiuax*). / Many words that have fallen out of use will be reborn (*multa renascentur quae iam cecidere*), and those will fall (*cadentque*) / that are now in repute (*quae nunc sunt in honore uocabula*), if usage wants so (*si uollet usus*), / in whose hands lies the judgment, the right and the norm of speech (*quem penes arbitrium est et ius et norma loquendi*). Horace, too, clearly conceives of linguistic change in terms of changing words (cf. Uhlfelder 1963: 28).
- 3 The phrases mentioned by Müller are κομψευόμενον λέγειν, ‘to say something in a more refined form’ (400b); to change a name ἐπὶ τὸ καλλικόν, ‘to a more beautiful form’ (407c); and καλλωπίζειν, to ‘beautify’ a name (408b, 409c, and cf. καλλωπισθέν [417e] and ὑπὸ καλλωπισμοῦ [414c]). Müller also singles out the specific terms εὐπρέπεια, ‘euphony’ (402e) and εὐστομία, also ‘euphony’ or, literally, ‘a good opening of the mouth’ (404d, 412e, 414c). It is worth pointing out that the genitive forms of the latter two terms are connected to the ‘postposition’ ἔνεκα and thus clearly indicate the *purpose* for which words are (intentionally) changed.

*Ancient Tools for the Description of Linguistic Change (1):
etymologia*

As regards *etymologia*, it should be stressed with Opelt (1965: 797) that ancient and modern conceptions of etymology differ significantly (cf. Herbermann 1981, Swiggers 1996). According to Opelt (tr. mine), modern linguistics understands etymology as ‘the reduction of an individual word to a reconstructed root and the explanation of its formation type’ in accordance with established phonetic laws; in antiquity, on the contrary, etymology was mostly conceived of merely as the ‘semantic history of an individual word’. However, it will become clear in what follows that the operations of *permutatio litterarum* do suppose certain phonetic laws or regularities, vague as these may be. Another important difference is that ancient etymology had an ontological and epistemological relevance which it has lost today (cf. Desbordes 1998). In close connection to the idea that the original form of a word is likely to reveal the essence of its referent (cf. above, p. 288), etymology served as a heuristic strategy in establishing the essence of things and, accordingly, the ‘true’ grounds for their names (cf. Herbermann 1991: 358–359).⁴ As a consequence, etymology could also be used as an argumentative strategy, which consists in urging a certain point by harking back to the alleged ‘true’ meaning of a particular term. This is why etymology was extensively discussed by Aristotle, Cicero, Quintilian and Boethius in connection to rhetorical invention. Cicero’s discussion of etymology in *Topica* 8.35 is illustrative of both the heuristic and the argumentative dimensions (cf. de Poerck 1970: 196–197; Sanders 1967: 367).⁵

It can be observed that the Latin term *etymologia*, going back directly to the Greek ἐτυμολογία, became established only slowly in the Latin tradition. Varro uses *etymologia* only a couple of times, giving preference to *origo (uerborum)* (Collart 1954: 251; Sanders 1967: 364), and in the portion from his *Topica* just mentioned, Cicero is seen looking for an appropriate Latin rendering for the Greek ἐτυμολογία and opting for *notatio* rather than *ueriloquium*. It appears

4 Herbermann (1991: 357) identifies this notion in a scholion to the grammar of Dionysius Thrax (2nd c. BC), which defines etymology as ‘the explanation of words (ἡ ἀνάπτυξις τῶν λέξεων), through which the truth comes to the fore (δι’ ᾧς τὸ ἀληθὲς σαφηνίζεται)’.

5 The passage reads as follows: ‘Many arguments are derived from etymology (*multa ... ex notatione sumuntur*). This is what is used when an argument is developed out of the meaning of a word (*cum ex uero nominis argumentum elicitur*). The Greeks call this ἐτυμολογία, and this translated word for word would be in Latin *ueriloquium* ['veriloquence']. But to avoid using a new word that is not very suitable, we call this kind *notatio*, because words are tokens of things (*quia sunt uerba rerum notae*)’.

that *etymologia* has become established by the time when Quintilian (1.6.28) refers to ‘etymology (*etymologia*), which inquires into the origin of words (*quae uerborum originem inquirit*)’, and only subsequently reproduces Cicero’s terminological doubt between *notatio* and *ueriloquium* (cf. de Poerck 1970: 208–209). I will come back to the notion and uses of *etymologia* when dealing with Isidore of Seville.

Ancient Tools for the Description of Linguistic Change (2): permutatio litterarum

The ancient notion of *permutatio litterarum* provides a toolkit for the description of formal changes in the domains of (among several others) grammar and rhetoric, which consists of the operations of addition (*adiection*, πρόσθεσις), subtraction (*detractio*, ἀφαίρεσις), permutation (*transmutatio*, μετάθεσις), and substitution (*immutatio*, ἀλλοίωσις) (Ax 1987; cf. Lausberg 1990: 250–254 § 462).⁶ In the Latin tradition, the scheme occurs for the first time in *Rhetorica ad Herennium* 4.29 (Desbordes 1990: 268),⁷ and Varro in *De lingua Latina* 5.1.6 and 6.1.2 relies on the operations of *permutatio litterarum* in justifying his etymologies (Collart 1954: 80, 90; Collart 1978b: 12; Müller 2003: 207 n. 33). Desbordes (1990: 269) specifies that Varro deploys the scheme in order to explain the evolution of words, and that he discerns the operations of *additio*, *demptio*, *traiectio*, and *commutatio* of letters (cf. Collart 1954: 80, 90; Collart 1978b: 12). It is Quintilian who in his *Institutio oratoria* 1.5.38–41 explicitly calls this set of operations the *quadripertita ratio*. Desbordes (1990: 269–270) points out that Quintilian was the one to develop the concept in all its ramifications, and in the most systematic and sophisticated way. In order to illustrate the embryonic form of historical phonetics which she ascribes to Latin grammarians, Desbordes (1990: 259; tr. mine) refers to 1.4.13–17 of Quintilian’s *Institutio*

6 Desbordes’ (1990: 266; cf. Desbordes 1983; tr. mine) presentation of the scheme is illustrative: Suppose a series made up of discrete elements: A B C. This series may vary

- quantitatively: by **addition**: A B C D, or by **removal**: A B;
- qualitatively: by **substitution**: A B E;
- by modification of the relations between the elements (which remain the same quantitatively and qualitatively): by **permutation**: A C B.

7 As regards the Greek tradition, Müller (2003: 207 n. 32) notes that five operations are mentioned throughout the *Cratylus*, namely addition, omission, or alteration of a letter, contraction of a word, or composition of two (or more) words formed by one of these operations. The eponymous interlocutor in Plato’s *Cratylus* argues at 432a that a new word arises in writing ‘when we take away or add or transpose something’ (έάν τι ἀφέλωμεν ἢ προσθῶμεν ἢ μεταθῶμεν τι) (Müller 2003: 207).

oratoria, which contains ‘a beginning of the study of this diachronic *mutatio*’, relying on embryonic ‘phonetic laws’.⁸

The strength of the conceptual and terminological apparatus of *permutatio litterarum* appears to be that it elevates the description of linguistic change to the level of explanation—possibly due in part to the fact that it assumes certain regularities. By simply describing the minute changes that take place, *permutatio litterarum* gives the impression of explaining what is going on when words and—words taken together—languages change. Thus, it constitutes a system that is internally consistent, although in the end it fails to answer the question of why it is that words actually change.⁹ As is shown by Ax (1987), the *quadripertita ratio* enjoyed a wide circulation in Greek and Latin school manuals (e.g. Donatus, *Ars maior* 3.1), and it was undoubtedly part of the standard curriculum in accordance to which early Christian Latin authors were trained. Throughout early Christian Latin literature, isolated comments on linguistic change on the word level can be gathered which clearly interact with the grammatical tradition. However, it is not until Isidore of Seville that a more or less systematic discussion of *permutatio litterarum* can be found—and then still in the ‘grammatical’ first book of his *Etymologiae*. In most cases the authors insert their isolated comments in order to make a specific doctrinal or exegetical point, but sometimes they only seem to intend to impress upon their readers. In this section, I will survey and discuss these isolated statements in chronological order.

Tertullian, Lactantius and Ambrose

When demonstrating in his *Ad nationes* that the pagan gods are nothing more than human ‘deifications’ of environmental realities, Tertullian argues at 2.12.17–18 that the Greek titan Κρόνος is nothing more than deified time, χρόνος, and is called like it (*dictum ... ut*), just like the Romans have derived the name *Saturnus* from *sationes*, ‘sowings’, as they consider Saturn the god of (pro)creation. Lactantius in *De opificio Dei* 12.17 integrates an otherwise lost explanation by Varro, according to which the Latin word *mulier* derives from *mollities*—because of the alleged ‘female weakness’—‘with one letter changed (*immutata*) and one taken away (*detracta*), as though it was *mollier*’ (cf. Opelt

8 Some of the ‘patterns’ singled out and exemplified by Quintilian which Desbordes mentions are [s] > [r] (*Valesius* > *Valerius*); [f] > [h] (*fordeum* > *hordeum*); [du] > [b] (*duellum* > *bellum*); [p] > [b] in Greek words (*Pyrrhus* > *Burrus*); and [ph] > [b] in Greek words (*Phryges* > *Bruges*).

9 As Desbordes (1990: 270) notes, the scheme had quite a number of shortcomings which did not go unnoticed by Quintilian; more specifically, he criticizes it at 1.6.32–38 when condemning ‘the etymological mania’ of his days (tr. mine) (cf. de Poerck 1970: 210).

1965:836). Given the fact that Lactantius probably had only a disparate, second-hand knowledge of Varro's works (Ogilvie 1978: 50–52), this information came to him almost certainly by way of intermediary sources. As Brandt indicates *ad locum* (CSEL 72/1: 46), this etymology was integrated by Isidore of Seville (*Etym.* 11.2.18; *De differentiis rerum* 19.82). The operations of *permutatio litterarum* are here explicitly invoked in combination to the etymological perspective in order to account for diachronic variation.

Ambrose describes a specific type of linguistic change in *De officiis* 1.8.26. He writes that the noun *officium* was originally derived from the verb *efficere*, as if it were *efficium*, but that 'with one letter changed (*immutata*) because of the grace of speech (*propter decorem sermonis*)' it evolved into *officium* (cf. Bartelink 1979b: 200) (cf. Isidore, *Etym.* 6.19.1). Furthermore, in *De incarnationis dominicae sacramento* 9.100 Ambrose anatomizes a case of linguistic change in Greek in function of his theological argument. In order to demonstrate that the noun οὐσία, 'substance', indicates that 'God is always', he analyzes it as οὐσία ἀεὶ, which he renders in Latin as *cum sit semper*. It was 'through a changement in the place of one letter (*unius litterae mutato ordine*) because of the sound (*propter sonum*) and because of the conciseness and elegance of speech (*compendium decoremque sermonis*)', he explains, that οὐσία ἀεὶ evolved into οὐσία (cf. *De fide* 3.15.127). As Faller (CSEL 79: 273) does not indicate a source *ad locum*, it is possible that Ambrose either drew on a (Greek) source which is now lost, or that he relied on his own advanced mastery of Greek in developing this etymology in function of his doctrinal point. It is important to note that in the two relevant statements made by Ambrose, euphony is invoked as a cause for linguistic change.

Ambrosiaster and Jerome

As was already pointed out in Sect. 2.2 (p. 70), Ambrosiaster in *Quaestiones ueteris et noui testamenti* 108.5 invokes rather complicated processes of linguistic change in order to demonstrate that the ethno- and glottonym *Hebreus* derives from the personal name *Habraham*, not from *Heber*. He first states the opinion of his adversaries, namely that the name *Heber* sounds more like *Hebrei*, 'because they are called *Hebrei*, not *Habrael*'. However, he argues that 'they are called *Hebrei*, not *Heberei*, while he was called *Heber*, not *Hebrer*'. In order to show how *Hebrei* can derive from *Habraham*, he argues that

because of the sounding (*propter sonum*) a letter was changed (*immutata*), so that they were called *Hebrei* instead of *Habraeli*, because that sounds better (*quia melius sonat*). For those from Iuda, too, are called not *Iudai* but *Iudaei*. For wherever something sounded harsh (*absurdum*), a

letter was changed (*immutata*), so that the word would possess a suitable sound (*sonum compositum*). For we say *meridie* instead of *medidie* and there are many comparable cases.

A similar account can be identified in the condensed (and thus possibly posterior) version in Ambrosiaster's *Commentarius in epistulas Paulinas* Phil. 3.7.3. It is clear that Ambrosiaster, like his contemporaries, approaches linguistic change 'atomically', as a matter of the substitution of letters within a word. As the cause for linguistic change, he explicitly refers—like Ambrose in the passages discussed above—to the aesthetic criterion of euphony. At a given point in history, the *ueteres* (intentionally) altered the word at issue in order to obtain a more suitable sound.¹⁰

Jerome occupies a particular place with regard to explicit observations on linguistic change. In the preface to *Commentarii in epistulas Paulinas* Gal. 2 (CCSL 77A: 83) he notes that it should not come as a surprise if the Galatians have slightly altered the Gaulish ('Trierisch') language of their ancestors (Sect. 7.3, p. 243 f.), 'since the Latin language itself (*ipsa Latinitas*) varies every day (*quotidie mutetur*) according to region as well as to time (*et regionibus ... et tempore*)'. Jerome's statement is a very explicit account of the change or 'variation'

¹⁰ Given its repeated use by Ambrosiaster, this seems an appropriate place to illustrate that the apparently historical example of *medidies* being altered by dissimilation into *meridies* is really a commonplace in the Latin grammatical tradition. Varro relies on his first-hand observation when noting in *De lingua Latina* 6.2.4 that the word *meridies* comes 'from the fact that it is the middle (*medius*) of the day (*dies*)', and when pointing out that 'the ancients (*antiqui*) said *d* in this word, and not *r*, as I have seen at Praeneste, cut on a sundial' (cf. Collart 1954: 94–95). It is Cicero who connects the case to the criterion of euphony when he suggests in *Orator* 157 that *medidies* was altered into *meridies* because the original form sounded less pleasant (*quod erat insuauius*). In *Institutio oratoria* 1.6.30 Quintilian cites the question 'whether *meridiem* or *medidiem* is correct for "midday"' as an example for the use of etymology in establishing linguistic correctness (cf. de Poerck 1970: 209). In the tradition of Latin grammars and literary commentaries, the example was reiterated by Velius Longus, who in his *De orthographia* (KGL 7: 71) puts it on a par with *auriculae* deriving from *audiculae*, and by Donatus, who in his commentary on Terence's *Adelphoe* (5.3.62.2) ascribes the dissimilation to the *ueteres* and observes that it was possible due to the 'affinity' which exists between *r* and *d* (*propter cognitionem inter se harum litterarum*). Among the encyclopaedic authors of late antiquity, the commonplace was consolidated by Nonius Marcellus (*De compendiosa doctrina* 1 p. 60 M), Macrobius (*Commentarii in Somnium Scipionis* 2.5.19), and Isidore of Seville (*Etym.* 3.42.3, 5.30.15, 13.1.6, and 17.7.2). For a more detailed discussion of the various uses of *meridies* and its etymology in Latin literature, cf. Denecker (forthc.d).

of languages as a whole, both on a diatopic and on a diachronic axis, but it is an exception in the Christian Latin tradition. Jerome notes in *Commentarius in Ecclesiasten* 5.9/10 that according to Cicero (viz. *De republica* 2.9.16)—whose information he significantly modifies—the word *pecuniosus* ‘was originally used of those who had the most *peculia*, i.e. [the ancient word for] *pecora*, cattle’ but that ‘gradually (*paulatim*), by careless usage (*per abusionem*), the word developed (*deuolutum*) into another meaning’, namely ‘rich’. It can be inferred from this passage that in Jerome’s opinion, semantic change is a gradual process, and that usage or more specifically wrong usage (*abusio*) is an important cause for lexico-semantic change (cf. Müller’s *Abnützungstheorie*).

Augustine and Cassiodorus

Augustine’s works contain not only specific applications of the principle of etymology but also general reflections on the origin of words (cf. Făgărăşanu 1997). A crucial observation with regard to linguistic change can be found in *De ciuitate Dei* 16.11.2, where Augustine states that ‘this multiplication and change of languages came forth from punishment’ (*de poena uenit illa multiplicatio mutatioque linguarum*), thus directly explaining the existence of linguistic change with reference to the events of Babel. In a passage which will be integrated by Isidore of Seville (*Etym.* 9.2.38), Augustine argues in the same paragraph that the names (*uocabula*) of the nations of Gen. 10 have partly remained as they were—presumably immediately after the events of Babel—‘so that it is clear even today whence they were derived’, as is the case with *Assyrii* deriving from Assur and *Hebrei* from Heber. Other ethnonyms, however, ‘have been changed (*mutata sunt*) with the lapse of time (*temporis uetustate*)’, so that it is difficult to find out where they come from. The ‘lapse of time’ is here explicitly given an explanatory value in the description of linguistic change. At 18.5 Augustine points out that a sarcophagus is called *σορός* in Greek, and that this word constitutes the first member of the compound name *Serapis*. He explains that this god ‘was originally (*primo*) called *Sorapis*’ from *σορός* combined with *apis* / Ἄπις, the Egyptian ox-god. He goes on to explain that ‘subsequently (*deinde*), with one letter changed (*commutata*), as it commonly happens (*ut fieri assolet*), he was called *Serapis*’. This slight lexical change is approached atomically, as the substitution of a single letter within a word. In addition, it can be observed that Augustine regards this kind of substitution as a common process.

It is important to emphasize that although Augustine makes an intensive use of etymology and *interpretatio nominis* on the practical level (cf. Opelt 1965: 840–841; Den Boeft 1979; O’Donnell 2004–2010), he also criticizes it in § 6 of his *De dialectica* (Jackson 1975: 10), an early work dating to 387. De Poerck

(1970: 204–205) notes that the text portion devoted by Augustine to (grammar and) etymology in this work has been identified by some as an otherwise lost extract from book 1 of Varro's *De lingua Latina* (GRF pp. 282–283 fr. 265; cf. Collart 1954: 281).¹¹ De Poerck himself believes that if the extract is to be connected to *De lingua Latina* at all, it should probably be situated in the first two books, both lost, which Varro would have devoted to a critical assessment of the arguments for and against etymology. Whether or not through the intermediary of Varro, the chapter at issue is an important source for Stoic etymological doctrine. It can be noted with Sanders (1967: 368) that the Stoic doctrine outlined by Augustine involves a close connection between essence and sound. In other words, it involves a strong 'analogist' component of sound symbolism or onomatopoeia in the motivation of names for things (Sect. 9.3, p. 319 f.). In summarizing Stoic doctrine, Augustine writes (cf. Herbermann 1991: 362) that

the Stoics believed that these cases—where the impression made on the senses by the things is in harmony with the impression made on the senses by the sounds (*ubi sensus rerum cum sonorum sensu concordarent*)—are, as it were, the cradle of words (*quasi cunabula uerborum*).

A specific example of this approach mentioned by Augustine (and summarized by Sanders) is an entire group of words (*uiolentus, uinculum, uincire, uimen, uetus, uia*) which—like *uis*, 'power', to which they allegedly all relate—begin with a ⟨u⟩, considered a powerful sound, because they denote powerful realities (cf. Desbordes' 'sympathie du signifiant et du signifié', Ch. 10, p. 348). Although Augustine devotes a lengthy portion of his work to this outline of Stoic etymological doctrine, he maintains a critical attitude towards the investigation into the origin of words and certainly towards the Stoics' approach, stating that 'this is a matter of curiosity (*res ... nimis curiosa*) rather than of necessity (*et minus necessaria*)'; and arguing that 'discerning the origin of words is like the interpretation of dreams—it is a matter of each man's ingenuity (*pro cuiusque ingenio iudicatur*)' (cf. Amsler 1989: 44–46).

Sanders (1967: 368) observes that for the continuity of etymology from (late) antiquity into the Middle Ages, Cassiodorus was far more significant than

¹¹ Baratin & Desbordes (1981: 53) put it as follows: 'La *Dialectique* de saint Augustin n'en a que plus d'importance. Conçu pour être intégré à un ensemble de traités sur les différentes disciplines, cet ouvrage atteste certainement l'influence de Varron, qui avait réalisé au moins partiellement un même ensemble, et donc vraisemblablement une *Dialectique*, mais sur plusieurs points la doctrine d'Augustin doit être originale.'

Augustine, due in part to the latter's critical attitude. On the basis of a self-reference in Cassiodorus' *De orthographia*, Sanders states that Cassiodorus compiled a *Liber de etymologiis* which is now lost, but which was one of the main sources for Isidore's *Etymologiae*. Sanders furthermore points at Cassiodorus' etymological activity both on the theoretical and on the practical level. On a general, theoretical level, Cassiodorus in *Institutiones* 2.1.2 (Mynors 1937: 96) defines *etymologia* as 'either a true or a likely interpretation (*aut uera aut uerisimilis demonstratio*) that explains from which origin words derive (*declarans ex qua origine uerba descendant*)' (cf. de Poerck 1970: 212). On a more specific, practical level, Cassiodorus invokes the principle of *permutatio litterarum* in suggesting a connection between Greek κύλιξ and Latin *calix* in *Expositio Psalmorum* 10.7. The (referenced) source for this statement are Macrobius' *Saturnalia* (5.21.18). Cassiodorus paraphrases Macrobius when writing that the nation of *Cylicrani* was located next to the city of Heraclea, and that 'its name was derived (*composito nomen*) from κύλιξ, a kind of goblet which he said was, with one letter changed, a *calix*'. In his commentary on Ps. 118:70 (*coagulatum est sicut lac cor eorum*) Cassiodorus states that *lac*, 'milk', derives from *liquor*, 'a fluid, liquid', with the letter *a* changed (*conuertitur*) to *i*, 'as is the case in *amicus*, *inimicus*, and the like' (cf. Schlieben 1974: 78 n. 107). In the passages discussed, Cassiodorus does not appear to have a particular argumentative intention with the etymologies he presents; his use of them seems to be merely anecdotal.¹²

Isidore

Given their very nature and approach (cf. Engels 1962; Fontaine 1988 [1978]; Amsler 1989: 133–147), Isidore's *Etymologiae* or *Origines* are an exceptionally rich source for comments on linguistic change within the domain of lexicosemantics, which make abundant use of the concept of *etymologia* and the operations of *permutatio litterarum*. Isidore turns the epistemological or heuristic dimension of etymology (cf. above, p. 291) into the methodological basis for his encyclopaedia, systematically trying to reveal the true essence of things by reducing their names to their original forms (cf. Fontaine 1959: 820; Merrills 2013). It seems useful in this connection to repeat (Sect. 1.1, p. 40) Isidore's crucial methodological acknowledgment at *Etym.* 1.29.1–2 (cf. de Poerck 1970: 212–219; Schweickard 1985), according to which *etymologia*

¹² It is interesting to note that Cassiodorus used a specific marginal *siglum*, namely 'ET' with a flat stroke on top, for etymologies occurring in his manuscripts (Schlieben 1974: 78).

is the origin of words (*origo uocabulorum*), when the force of a verb or a noun is inferred through interpretation (*cum uis uerbi uel nominis per interpretationem colligitur*) ... The knowledge of a word's etymology often has an indispensable usefulness for interpreting the word (*cuius cognitio saepe usum necessarium habet in interpretatione sua*), for when you have seen whence a word has originated (*nam dum uideris unde ortum est nomen*), you understand its force more quickly (*citius uim eius intellegis*). Indeed, one's insight into anything is clearer when its etymology is known (*omnis enim rei inspectio etymologia cognita planior est*).

It is evident from this quotation that Isidore's conception of etymology is predominantly heuristically and epistemologically oriented. For Isidore, the knowledge of things depends on the knowledge of their names.

In proposing his etymologies for Latin words, Isidore seems to maintain an unsystematic and predominantly implicit principle of 'cognate letters' (*litterae cognatae* or *litterarum cognitiones*), for which he is indebted to the grammatical tradition, primarily by way of Marius Victorinus' *Ars grammatica* (Fontaine 1959: 89–90; cf. Diderichsen 1974: 280–281). While Desbordes (1990: 168) points out that the 2nd-century grammarian Scaurus is the only one to discuss *cognatio litterarum* in a systematic way, it is almost certain that Isidore's isolated remarks ultimately go back to Varro. The principle of 'cognate letters' involves that certain couples of letters have a special (more intimate) connection to each other and as a consequence tend to alter into each other more easily than into different letters. The closest Isidore comes to an explicit statement of this principle is at 1.27.4, where he writes that 'sometimes letters are regularly (*rite*) put in place of other letters'. He goes on to cite the different recurring cases of 'cognate letters', each time accompanied by an example. These cases can be rendered schematically as follows:

- (1) B ~ P (*B et P litteris quaedam cognatio est*)
- (2) C ~ G (*C et G [litterae] quandam cognitionem habent*)
- (3) C ~ Q (*C et Q similiter cognatio est*)
- (4) L ~ D (*L autem litteram interdum pro D littera utimur*)
- (5) R ~ S (*R littera communionem habet cum s littera*)

In what follows, I will discuss each of these cases in some more detail. It is important to note that whereas some connections established by Isidore are today considered correct, others do not correspond to a linguistic reality.

(1) B ~ P (*B et P litteris quaedam cognatio est*): *Burrus ~ Pyrrhus*

This is the connection between the voiced and the unvoiced labial stops. As was indicated above, the principle of ‘cognate letters’ is not Isidore’s own invention. Fontaine (1959: 89–90) points out that the connection B ~ P is based on Scaurus’ *De orthographia* (KGL 7: 14), and notes that the example is also attested in Cicero’s *Orator* (160). In the latter passage, Cicero observes that whereas the ‘ancient’ Romans such as Ennius used to pronounce ‘Pyrrhus’ as ‘Burrus’, the Romans of his own days have adopted the Greek pronunciation ‘Pyrrhus’ for this loanword (cf. Collart 1954: 96).

(2) C ~ G (*c et G [litterae] quandam cognationem habent*): *centum, trecentos ~ quadringtones; gloriosus ~ claritas* (10.112); *teca ~ tegat* (18.9.3); *licinum ~ ligata* (19.22.27); *gauata ~ cauata* (20.4.11)

This is the connection between the voiced and the unvoiced velar stops. Fontaine (1959: 89) notes that like the connection B ~ P, the connection C ~ G, too, is based on Scaurus’ *De orthographia* (KGL 7: 14). He furthermore points out that the ordinal numbers for hundreds as examples for the present case are drawn from Marius Victorinus, *Ars grammatica* 4.28.

(3) C ~ Q (*c et Q similiter cognatio est*): *huiusce ~ cuiusque; cum* (preposition) ~ *quum* ('adverb', actually conjunction)

This is the connection between the unvoiced velar and labiovelar stops. The difference between *cum* and *quum* is discussed by Marius Victorinus (*Ars grammatica* [KGL 6: 13]) and by Cassiodorus (*De orthographia* [KGL 7: 156]). However, for the actual connection between C and Q, no sources are indicated in scholarly literature, and neither have I been able to identify a source. Accordingly, it is possible that the connection C ~ Q was a personal addition by Isidore, possibly based on the information on the historical development of the Latin alphabet which he could consult in the grammatical tradition and which he also integrates in his encyclopaedia (Sect. 10.2, p. 367f.).

Terminologically and conceptually it can be observed on the above passages that Isidore uses a rather unspecific phrase, namely (*quaedam*) *cognatio*, in order to denote the connection between the letters.¹³ All of the three above

¹³ It is also important to note that I have not marked the letters dealt with by Isidore

cases belong to the same portion of Isidore's exposition, in *Etym.* 1.27.4. Further on in the same section (1.27), however, Isidore mentions two more cases of 'cognate letters'.

- (4) L ~ D (*L autem litteram interdum pro D littera utimur*): *latum* ~ *datum*; *calamitatem* ~ *cadamitatem* (< *cadere*); *consilium* ~ *considium* (6.16.12)

This case, discussed in 1.27.14, is more remarkable than the connections between 'neighbouring' consonants which have been discussed in the above. The connection L ~ D is a 'phonetic sabinism' in the Latin language—more specifically, it is the correspondence of the Latin D with the Sabine L—which received extensive attention from Varro, who was of Sabine provenance (Collart 1954: 99–100, 233–243). It thus seems safe to assume that Varro's works are the ultimate source for the connection L ~ D in the Latin grammatical tradition. Overall, it is important to note with Collart that nowhere in the parts of his work which have been preserved, Varro formulates this correspondence as an explicit principle. However, he does draw attention in *De lingua Latina* 6.8.83 to the connection between the Latin noun *odor*, 'smell', and the dialectal verb *olere*, 'to smell'. He explains that 'with the change of a letter (*littera commutata*) are formed *odor* or *olor*, and hence *olet*, *odorari*, *odoratus*, *odora res*, and similarly other words'.

Servius is more neat when he points out in his commentary on Vergil's *Elogiae* that 'indeed, L and D sometimes give way to each other (*interdum sibi inuicem cedunt*)', hence *sella* is also said instead of *sedda*, which comes from *sedere*. Marius Victorinus is even more explicit when he points out in his *Ars grammatica* that '*nouensiles* should be written with L or with D; for the letter L had a connection with the letter D among the ancients (*communionem enim habuit L littera cum D apud antiquos*), as in *dinguam* and *linguam*, *dacrimis* and *lacrimis*, *Capitodium* and *Capitolium*, *sella* from *sedes*, and *olere* from *odor*' (KGL 6: 26). According to Fontaine (1959: 89), it

as /phonemes/ or as ⟨graphemes⟩, since this distinction seems to be irrelevant in this context (cf. Vogt-Spira 1991). It should be pointed out that the apparent irrelevance of this distinction may have been no coincidence in the grammatical tradition on which Isidore relies, since from an etymological point of view, one has a greater freedom if one does not need to respect a distinction between phonemes and graphemes. The affinity and ease of exchange are valid both on the level of spoken and of written language. Generally speaking, early Christian Latin authors do not seem to develop a clear distinction—at least not terminologically—between what we know as 'phonemes' and 'graphemes'.

is Marius Victorinus who provided Isidore's immediate source. With specific regard to the affinity between *calamitas* and *cadamitas* mentioned by Isidore, reference can be made to Gn. Pompeius Magnus, who according to Marius Victorinus, *Ars grammatica* (*KGL* 6: 8) maintained the pronunciation and the orthography *kadamitas* instead of *calamitas* (cf. Desbordes 1990: 214–215).

- (5) R ~ S (*R littera communionem habet cum s littera*): *honos* ~ *honor*; *labos* ~ *labor*; *arbos* ~ *arbor*

At 1.27.23 Isidore mentions a connection which is nowadays known under the name of 'rhotacism', namely the alteration of an original intervocalic *s* into *r*.¹⁴ Whereas Fontaine (1959: 89) notes that the connection R ~ S is drawn from Marius Victorinus' *Ars grammatica* (*KGL* 6: 7), the ultimate source is almost certainly Varro (cf. Collart 1954: 97–100). Collart (1954: 92; tr. mine) notes that Varro 'clearly singled out the phenomenon of rhotacism' and 'in several passages, he even made the effort of going back to the ancient texts'. Uhlfelder (1963: 26) in this connection points at *De lingua Latina* 7.3.26, where Varro mentions the anterior forms *foedesum* for *foederum*, *plusima* for *plurima*, *meliosem* for *meliorum*, *asenam* for *arenam*, and *ianitos* for *ianitor*. An isolated example can be found in *De lingua Latina* 6.1.2, where Varro notes that *ab lasibus lares* (Collart 1978b: 12).

Instead of *quaedam cognatio* Isidore now uses the circumlocution [y] *litteram interdum pro [x] littera utimur*, next to the more definite terminology *communionem (habet)*. It can be inferred from the manifestations of 'cognate letters' quoted by Isidore that the existence of an affinity between each time two letters is obvious, although the precise nature of this affinity remains less than clear to him. In addition, it should be emphasized that only 3 of the 5 affinities are introduced and discussed within the same block of text, although all of them belong to *Etym.* 1.27. Rather than presenting a clear-cut and coherent methodological apparatus consisting of compelling phonetic laws, Isidore is integrating a number of generalizing comments concerning 'cognate letters'. These observations may support on an *ad hoc* basis individual etymologies, which evidently remain in the focus of his attention. Nevertheless, his treatment of *etymolo-*

¹⁴ In the case of the nominative forms cited by Isidore, the 'r' results from analogy with the declined forms where rhotacism actually occurs.

gia and *permutatio litterarum* is far more elaborate and systematic than the isolated comments integrated by early Christian Latin authors writing before him. However, it must be stressed once more that we are here dealing with the ‘grammar’ within Isidore’s *Etymologiae*.

2 ‘Lexicographical Exoticism’

Generally speaking, early Christian Latin authors show a particular interest for ‘unusual’, i.e. obsolete or exotic words. Probably due in part to this fascination, their remarks on lexical facts are rather anecdotal in nature. In many cases it seems to be more about ‘display’ or adding a certain exotic ‘flavour’ than about the systematic description of lexical facts. The authors’ fascination for unusual words (nouns and names) seems to accord with a general tendency in Latin literature of (late) antiquity. Collart (1978c: 196) suggests that the extensive attention paid by Latin grammarians to ‘special cases’ or *curiosa* instead of regular paradigms is a particular manifestation of ‘the Roman taste for *mirabilia*’ (tr. mine). Likewise, Marrou (4^e 1958: 148, 151) singles out *curiositas*—‘on cherche à savoir pour savoir’—and a predilection for *mirabilia*—‘[le] goût pour le fait bizarre, anormal, singulier, beaucoup plus que pour le fait typique et caractéristique’—as important traits of ancient erudition in general, which moulded Augustine’s thought in particular. With specific reference to Isidore of Seville, Fontaine (1959: 814; tr. mine) notes that the encyclopaedist’s ‘exaltation of the peculiar in its uniqueness connects to the interest which late antiquity already fostered for *mirabilia*'.¹⁵

A different but related characteristic of early Christian Latin authors’ linguistic comments on the word level is that they are only seldom based on first-hand, empirical observation. With the possible major exception of Jerome and minor exceptions in other Christian authors (for some isolated words), it is justified to say that early Christian Latin authors derive their lexical information from the works of pagan and Christian predecessors. One good example is the glossing of the Hebrew personal name *Emmanu[h]el* as *nobiscum Deus*, which is

¹⁵ As a specific ramification of this overall interest for ‘special cases’, one can also mention a predilection for proper names. Collart (1954: 295–296) points out that Varro—whose impact on the entire Latin tradition has already been emphasized—is interested in all branches of onomastics, ranging from the names of gods to men’s *praenomina* and *agnomina*, the names of months, priests, religious feasts, parts of the world, provinces, territories, peoples, streams and hamlets (I am closely following Collart’s list). The same tendency is very clear in the works of Jerome and of Isidore of Seville.

repeated over and again throughout early Christian Latin literature. Although from an anachronistic perspective, this may detract from the authors' merit as 'linguists', their reliance on previous works makes it possible to reconstruct the circulation of lexical knowledge among early Christian Latin authors. An illustrative case of this transmission and circulation of lexical knowledge in early Christianity is the word *gazophylacium*, which goes back to γαζόφυλάκιον in the Greek Septuagint (Marc. 12:41, 12:43; Luc. 21:2). As a consequence of its biblical origin, the word occurs exclusively in the works of Christian authors (cf. Bartelink 1984a: 100). A search in Brepols' online databases returns 161 hits for the *aetas patrum*.

As Bartelink (1984a: 101) points out, the interpretation of the first part of this hybrid word—*gaza*—as being 'Persian' can already be found in pagan Latin authors such as Curtius (*Historia Alexandri Magni* 3.13.5) and Servius (commentary on Vergil's *Aeneid* 1.119) (cf. Maltby 1991: 254–255; Graves 2007a: 41). It can be added to this that Diomedes in his *Ars grammatica* (KGL 1: 428) refers to a lost passage from Varro, where the latter mentions *gaza* as an example for the category of 'barbarian syllables'. In Christian Latin literature, Jerome was the first author to gloss this word, noting in *Commentarii in Isaiam* 11.39.1/2 (cf. *Commentarii in Ezechielem* 12.40.17/19 [CCSL 75: 570]) that *gaza* is not a Hebrew but a barbarian word, as it means 'riches' in Persian (*lingua Persarum*). Eucherius of Lyons—who generally speaking draws heavily on the lexical information provided in Jerome's works (Opelt 1965: 831; Greschat 2006: 333)—notes in book 2 of *Instructiones ad Salonium* (CCSL 66: 215) that *gazophylacium* is 'composed (*compositum*) out of the Persian and the Greek language (*de lingua Persica et Graeca*)'. Likewise, Gregory the Great (cf. Bartelink 1984a: 100) explains in *Homiliae in Hiezechihel prophetam* 2.6.2 that

as φυλάττειν in the Greek language (*sermone Graeco*) means 'to guard', and resources in the Persian language (*lingua Persica*) are called *gazae*, a place where resources are guarded is usually called *gazophylacium*.

At the ending point of this 'chain of transmission', Isidore in *Etym.* 15.1.16 explains that the Palestinian city of Gaza was called so because the Persian king Cambyses located his treasury there, and 'in the language of the Persians (*Persarum ... lingua*) a treasury is called *gaza*'. And in *Etym.* 20.9.1 he notes that *gazophylacium* 'is a composite from Persian and Greek (*de lingua Persa et Graeca*)', for *gaza* in Persian means 'treasury', and φυλάκιον in Greek means 'custody'.

Another instance of the transmission of lexical information can be found in Lactantius, who in *Divinae institutiones* 1.6.7 quotes a relatively lengthy passage

from a lost work of Varro's (*in libris rerum diuinarum quos ad C. Caesarem pontificem maximum scripsit*), which has it that the noun *Sibylla* is made up of the components σιοί and βούλλα, which 'in the Aeolic dialect' (*Aeolico genere sermonis*) allegedly correspond to θεοί, 'gods', and βουλή, 'will', respectively. On the basis of these elements, it is concluded that 'accordingly she was called *Sibylla* as if it were (*quasi*) θεοβούλη'. This Greek etymology is taken to imply that the sibyl knows and phrases the will of the gods. It seems plausible that Varro relies on Greek predecessors, but I have not been able to identify a particular source. In the tradition of Latin literary commentaries, Varro's statement turns up in Servius' commentary on Vergil's *Aeneid* (3.445) (cf. Graves 2007a: 36) and in Iunius Philargyrius' (possibly 'Filagrius') *Explanatio* on Vergil's *Eclogae* 4.4. As Brandt points out *ad locum* (CSEL 19: 20), the information was also integrated by Christian Latin authors subsequent to Lactantius. Jerome slightly alters the Greek form and puts it to a specific use when he argues in *Aduersus Iouinianum* 1.41 (PL 23: 270C)—a polemical work concerned with marriage and virginity—that if the virginal sibyl 'in the Aeolic dialect (*Aeolici genere sermonis*) is called θεοβούλη, it is rightly written that virginity alone knows the will of God'. The standard form of the explanation is summarized by Isidore in *Etym.* 8.8.1. It is a characteristic feature of this kind of circulation of lexical information that it is very difficult to establish precisely on which sources the authors are relying. As is noted over and again by Fontaine (1959), the importance of peripheral and often lost intermediary sources such as (possibly anonymous) commentaries, lexica and notes cannot be overemphasized.

It seems useful also to quote a number of cases where authors apparently rely on the first-hand, empirical observation of lexical facts. Two isolated comments on 'Gaulish' or 'Celtic' words can be found in Ausonius and in Venantius Fortunatus. Ausonius in *Ordo urbium nobilium* 160, when praising what is today the city of Cahors, refers to a neighbouring well and its protecting goddess which 'in the language of the Celts' (*Celtarum lingua*) are called *Diuona*. Likewise, Venantius Fortunatus in *Carmen* 1.9.9–10 notes that the basilica of St. Vincent in Bordeaux was formerly called *uer nemetes*, which in the Gaulish language (*Gallica lingua*) means 'enormous temple'.¹⁶ The same author in *Vita sanctae Radegundis* 1.13 (MGH SRM 2: 369) mentions *stapio* (a kind of diadem), *camisa* (a linen garment), *manica* (gants or sleeves that cover the hands), *cofta* (a sort of cap), and *fibula*, terms which denote elements of a queenly apparel

¹⁶ Fortunatus' observation corresponds to a linguistic reality; cf. Reydellet's explanatory note (1994: 28 n. 40): '*Vernemetis* est formé de *uer* qui est un préfixe intensif ..., et de *nemetis* dérivé du gaulois νεμῆτων de la même racine que le latin *nemus*, cf. Ernout-Meillet, *Dictionnaire*, s.u. *nemus*, p. 437: 'le sens initial doit être 'clairière où se célèbre un culte'''.

and which he notes belong to ‘barbarian speech’ (*sermone ut loquar barbaro*). In what follows, I will focus on Jerome and Isidore, whose works are extremely rich with observations regarding the lexicon of ‘exotic’ languages.

Jerome on ‘Exotic’ Words

In Jerome’s works, comments on or glosses of ‘Semitic’—Hebrew, Aramaic, Syriac—words are ubiquitous. In this connection, reference should be made to the exegetical lexica composed or translated/adapted by Jerome, such as *Liber interpretationis Hebraicorum nominum*, *De situ et nominibus locorum Hebraicorum*, and *Quaestiones Hebraicae in Genesim* (Sect. 5.3, p. 178). The *Liber interpretationis Hebraicorum nominum* has been extensively studied by Wutz (1914–1915) as an important representative of *onomastica sacra*, the interpretation of sacred names, which is also prominent in the works of Origen (Hanson 1956). I will restrict myself in this section to statements on ‘Semitic’ words which have a particular interest because of a higher degree of metalinguistic reflection, i.e. words accompanied by language-oriented observations going beyond comments of the type *Syrum / Hebraeum est*, which are pervasive in Jerome’s works. In *Vita sancti Hilarionis* 28.3 Jerome refers to a kind of giant dragons and notes that ‘in an indigenous language (*gentili sermone*) they call them *boas*’ (cf. Adams 2013: 116). As the life of Hilarion is situated in Palestine (Sect. 6.4, p. 212), the ‘indigenous language’ should probably be considered a ‘Semitic’ one. In *In Hieremiam prophetam libri sex* 5.46.1 Jerome singles out the Greek *χλοιοί* as an equivalent to Latin *catenae*, and notes that ‘in Hebrew these are called *mutoth* and in vulgar speech (*sermone uulgari*) they call them *boiae*’. With the phrase *sermone uulgari*, Jerome here refers to ‘vulgar Latin’—as he usually does.¹⁷

On a couple of occasions throughout the *Liber interpretationis Hebraicorum nominum*, Jerome comments on words that Hebrew and ‘Syriac’ (presumably the Christian dialect of Aramaic) have in common, or on words that are composed of Hebrew and Syriac elements. Some examples of the lexical items concerned and the terminology used are the following. At 60 Jerome notes that *Barion* is ‘in an equal degree (*pariter*) Syriac and Hebrew, for *bar* means ‘son’ in Syriac, and *iona* means ‘dove’ in either language’—an observation which will be integrated by Eucherius of Lyons in book 2 of his *Instructiones ad Salonium* (CCSL 66: 190). At 67 he points out that both *Barsaban* and *Bernice* are names ‘composed (*compositum*) out of Syriac and Hebrew’. And still at 67 he observes

¹⁷ Whereas for a general study of the term *uulgo* in Latin literature one can refer to Sofer (1936), a survey of ‘vulgar words’ in the writings of Jerome is provided by Lammert (1918), with additions by Antin (1971) and some valuable corrections by Bartelink (1979a).

that the toponym *Creta* ‘is in between (*inter*) Syriac and Hebrew’. Furthermore, Jerome notes in *Commentarii in euangelium Matthaei* 1.10.12–13 that to Greek χαῖρε and Latin *hauē* corresponds *salom lach* or *salama lach*, a greeting which means ‘peace to you’ and which is both Hebrew and Syriac.

In *In Hieremiam prophetam libri sex* 2.12.3 he points out that where the Latin text of Ier. has *lacus*, this should be understood more precisely—according to the Greek text—as *cisterna*, ‘which in the Syriac and Hebrew language is called *gubba*’. Already in *Vita sancti Pauli* 6 (PL 23: 21) Jerome had made reference to a cistern (*cisterna*) and noted in passing that ‘the Syrians call this a *gubba* in their indigenous/native language (*gentili sermone*)’. Hayward (2010: 293 with n. 51), noting that ‘Jerome’s nomenclature is not precise’, points out that *gubba* is in fact almost certainly Aramaic instead of Hebrew or Syriac.¹⁸ In the connection of his quarrel with Augustine on the preferable translation of Ion. 4:6, Jerome notes in *Commentarii in prophetas minores* Ion. 4.6 that for *cucurbita*, ‘pumpkin’, or *hedera*, ‘ivy’, in the Latin Bible text the Hebrew source text has *ciceion* (קִיכְעֵי), which corresponds to *ciceia* in the Syriac and Punic languages. Dealing with the same textual issue in *Ep. 112.22.2–3*, he notes that the Hebrew text has *ciceion*, ‘which the Syrians commonly (*uulgo*) call *ciceia*'.¹⁹ Bazzana (2010: 310) points out that ‘the exact botanic identification of this plant ... still remains a mystery, because it appears only here in the entire Hebrew Bible’. This evidently explains the confusion with regard to the preferable translation of *ciceion*.

As can be seen from this sample of examples, Jerome’s notion of shared lexical items in Syriac and Hebrew is very vague. It is impossible to establish with certainty whether Jerome thinks these shared words are due to lexical borrowing, to some kind of *Sprachbund* effect, or to a genealogical relationship.

¹⁸ On Syriac in Jerome, cf. furthermore Rebenich (1992: 93) and King (2009). On the glottonymic confusion between Syriac, Aramaic and Chaldean, cf. Hilhorst (2007: 779–780), and p. 240.

¹⁹ There are some further isolated remarks on ‘Assyrian’ and Punic. In *Commentarii in prophetas minores* Abd. 20/21 (CCSL 76: 373) Jerome notes that in Assyrian (*lingua Assyriorum*) a boundary is called *sapharad*. In *Ep. 129.4.3* he mentions an African ethnonym when writing that the *Barcae* (*Aen. 4.42*) were so named after the city of Barca (presumably a Punic toponym), and that ‘the Africans (*Afri*) now call them *Bariciani*, with a corrupted word (*corrupto sermone*)’. Jerome also gives indirect information on the (more ancient) Egyptian lexicon when noting in *Commentarii in Isaiam* 13.46.1/2 that the Egyptian town Thmouis—he writes Θμοῦις—has its name ‘in the Egyptian language (*lingua Aegyptia*) from a he-goat (*hircus*)’—not from an eagle owl, as Opelt (1965: 834) believes. In *Commentarii in Ezechielem* 9.30.1/19 he glosses *Bubastus*—the name of another Egyptian city—as *oris experimentum*, ‘according to the Egyptian language’ (*iuxta linguam Aegyptiacam*).

However, it might be a reasonable guess to combine the latter two options, and to assume that in Jerome's opinion, the words that Syriac and Hebrew have in common are words belonging to Hebrew—the primeval language—persisting in Syriac, which necessarily derives from Hebrew but also has a higher (geographic and structural) proximity to it (Sect. 7.3, p. 240).

Jerome is clearly the only early Christian Latin author to consult Hebrew and Aramaic sources 'on his own' and to integrate lexical information on Semitic languages into his discussions of points of exegesis and theology. His work constitutes an important innovation in linguistic description and comparison insofar as the word level is concerned, but its actual 'linguistic momentum' on later generations of exegetes is in fact very limited. There must have been some people in Jerome's environment who had notions of Hebrew—e.g. his female pupils in Rome and/or in Bethlehem—but Jerome did not have any direct collaborators who were able to continue and to elaborate on his philological work on Semitic languages. It seems justified in this connection to follow Hilhorst (2007: 800), who states that Jerome's works provided a mine of linguistic information for his successors (cf. Sanders 1967: 368; Thiel 1973: 14–21), which did however not encourage them to study Hebrew themselves, but rather made this effort superfluous. In specific terms, we see that Jerome's exegetic works were mined by authors mostly active in a monastic environment and composing manuals for their (linguistically often less gifted) collaborators and heirs. Some prominent cases in point are the *Instructiones ad Salonium* by Eucherius of Lyons (Lérins), the *Institutiones* by Cassiodorus (Vivarium), and the *Etymologiae* by Isidore. The originating environment and the purpose of these manuals presumably explains why the authors often handle the information provided by Jerome in a selective and simplifying way.

Jerome also makes a number of observations on lexical facts in languages that are not 'Semitic' ones. In *Ep. 22.34.1* Jerome quotes a couple of 'Egyptian'—presumably Coptic—words when dealing with the three types of monks living in Egypt. First he mentions the *coenobium*, 'which they call *sauhes* in their indigenous language (*gentili lingua*)', namely Coptic. Having mentioned the *anachoretae* as the second type of monks, he moves on to the 'worst and most neglected' type, 'which they call *remnuoth*', another Coptic word (cf. Kelly 1975: 102; Guillaumont 1995: 87).²⁰ If it is true—as Krauss (1893–1894: 48–49) concluded from *Ep. 108.14*—that Jerome visited a number of places in Egypt, it can

²⁰ On the precise type of monk corresponding to the term *remnuoth*, cf. Guillaumont (1995: 92): 'Il leur est reproché de garder la possession de leurs biens et de se montrer après au gain; de ne pas, en conséquence, de vrais moines, encore qu'ils affectent de l'être par leur vêtement et leurs pratiques ascétiques extérieures, comme le jeûne; de vivre dans les

be guessed that Jerome's current remarks rely on the first-hand observation of lexical facts or, at least, on linguistic informants. On two occasions, Jerome also mentions words used in the region where he must have been born, namely in present-day Croatia. In *Commentarii in Isaiam* 7.19.5/11 he writes that 'beer' 'in the province of Dalmatia and Pannonia is commonly (*uulgo*) called *sabarium*, with an indigenous and barbarian word (*gentili barbaroque sermone*)'. Kelly (1975: 8 with n. 36)—who believes that although the language of his family was Latin, Jerome 'could probably get along in the Illyrian tongue with peasants and slaves'—suggests that 'the most natural explanation would be that he knew something of the language as a child', *sabarium* thus being a trace of this mastery in Jerome's old age. Likewise, Jerome notes in *Commentarii in Ezechielem* 1.4.9/12 that where the Hebrew has *chasamim*, 'grain, spelt', the Latin versions deriving from Aquila and Symmachus have *ze(i)a*, and that 'we call this either *far* or *spica* and *spelta* in the indigenous language of Italy and Pannonia (*gentili Italiae Pannoniaeque sermone*)'. In this case, too, it seems safe to assume that Jerome is relying on his personal observation.

Isidore on 'Exotic' Words: A Brief Introduction

Whereas Jerome's linguistic comments on the word level may have been based relatively often on first-hand observation, on a live contact with native speakers, or on the consultation of source material in the languages concerned, this is typically not the case with Isidore's encyclopaedia. The *Etymologiae* are a real treasure of lexical information on 'exotic' languages, but this treasure relies nearly exclusively on the written, 'bookish' tradition. It seems useful to reiterate on this point the following (general) observation made by Fontaine (1959: 760):

Cette masse de scolies, de gloses, de commentaires, d'abrégés et d'extraits technographiques, heurématiques, doxographiques, isagogiques a joué dans la bibliothèque d'Isidore de Séville le rôle de nos dictionnaires et de nos encyclopédies modernes.

On the basis of this tradition, Isidore frequently mentions and discusses foreign words in his works. In this section, I am not integrating Isidore's discussions of Latin, Greek, Hebrew, Aramaic, or Syriac words. For the latter three languages

villes et les bourgs, dans leur propre maison, habitant parfois deux ou trois ensemble, de manière tout à fait indépendante, ignorant toute discipline et toute subordination à un supérieur, chacun vivant à sa guise; Jérôme leur reproche en outre de dénigrer le clergé, de manger avec excès les jours de fêtes et aussi de visiter les vierges.'

(biblical place names and personal names), Isidore relies nearly exclusively on Jerome's exegetical lexica (Fontaine 1959: 870). In what follows, I will discuss Isidore's observations on words actually or allegedly belonging to other 'exotic' languages. In order to demonstrate the 'bookish' character of Isidore's observations, I will pay due attention to the sources for Isidore's information. However, I will also single out a couple of cases where Isidore might be relying on first-hand observations or at least on linguistic informants. Overall, it is important to emphasize (although this does not involve a value judgment) that Isidore's observations are unsystematic and anecdotal in nature.

Isidore on 'Oriental' Words

- *Phoenician*: In *Etym.* 15.1.28–30 Isidore states that the city of Sidon was called so by the Phoenicians from its abundance of fish, because 'Phoenicians call (*Phoenices ... uocant*) a fish *sidon*'. Furthermore, he writes that the city of Carthage was founded by Dido, a Phoenician. She called it *Carthada*, 'which in the Phoenician language (*Phoenica lingua*) means 'new city'', and that 'with altered pronunciation (*sermone uerso*), it was called *Carthago*'. I have not been able to identify a precise source for Isidore's observations, but given its subject matter Isidore's source should probably be sought in the tradition of school commentaries on Vergil's *Aeneid*.
- *Persian*: 'Persian' words are rather prominent in the *Etymologiae*. At 9.2.120–121 (cf. 14.5.9) Isidore connects the origin of the ethnonym *Numidae* (Numidians) to the Medes, Persians, and Armenians who belonged to the army of Hercules, and who after the latter died occupied the coasts of Africa. He furthermore explains that the Persians did not settle but 'wandered through open fields and diverse deserts', and that accordingly, 'they called themselves *Numides* in their own language (*propria lingua*), that is, 'wandering and errant and without a city'. As Reydellet (1984: 110 n. 152) points out, this comment goes back, possibly indirectly, to Sallust's *De bello Iugurthino* (18.1). At 13.21.15 Isidore relies on Solinus' *Polyhistor* (37.6, 38.4–5) (Gasparotto 2004: 144–145 n. 286) when writing that the Persian river Choaspes is 'so named in their language because it has amazingly sweet waters'. With regard to the 'bookish' and indirect nature of Isidore's heuristics, one can cite Marrou's (1958: 147) characterization of Solinus' *Polyhistor* as a 'paquet de fiches commodément classées' which made it superfluous to consult larger encyclopaedic works. Lastly, Isidore notes at 14.3.12 that the Persians worship the sun, 'which is called *El* in their language', thus reproducing lexical information from Servius' commentary on Vergil's *Aeneid* (1.642) (Spevak 2011: 20 n. 63).

- ‘*Trogodyte*’: At 16.7.9, in his discussion of gems, Isidore mentions a word allegedly belonging to the language spoken by a (fanciful) people of cave-dwellers designated *Trogodytae*. This people is often discussed in Greek and Latin ethnographic literature, the original ethnonym *Trogodytae* (Τρωγοδύται) later being (erroneously) interpreted as τρώγλη + δύω, hence *trogolodytae*, which was subsequently rendered as ‘cave-dwellers’ (Jahn in *PRE*). Isidore writes that the *topazion*, a green kind of gem, was discovered by Trogodyte bandits on an Arabian island, and that both the gem and the island (*Topazus*) are named after this event, ‘for in the language of the Trogodytes (*Trogodytarum lingua*) τοπάζειν means ‘to seek’. As Barney *et al.* point out (2006: 323), this is in fact simply the meaning of the Greek verb τοπάζειν. Isidore’s ultimate source for this chunk of information is Pliny the Elder’s *Naturalis historia* (37.32.107–108), as Feáns Landeira (2011: 90 n. 2) indicates.
- *Arabic*: At 12.7.22 Isidore writes that the phoenix is an Arabian bird, named so either from its colour or because it is unique in the world, ‘for the Arabs say (*Arabes ... uocant*) *fenix* for ‘singular’. As André (1986: 240 n. 477) points out, this information also occurs in Pliny the Elder (10.2.3) and in Lactantius’ *De aue Phoenice* (31–32), both of which may have been a direct or indirect source for Isidore.
- ‘*Tyrian*’: At 14.6.7 Isidore notes that the island of Gadis (Cadiz) was occupied by the Tyrians (*Tyrii*), who ‘called it *Gadir* in their language, that is, ‘enclosed’, because it is enclosed on all sides by the sea’. Spevak (2011: 105 n. 383) suggests that this information goes back to Pliny the Elder (4.22.120) by way of Solinus’ *Polyhistor* (23.12).
- *Indian*: At 12.2.14 Isidore points out that ‘among the inhabitants of India (*apud Indos*) an elephant is called *barro* after the sound it makes’—André (1986: 98 n. 135) does not indicate a source—and at 16.7.5 that *beryllus*—beryl, a kind of gem—‘originates in India’ and has its name ‘in the language of that nation’ (*gentis suae lingua*). For the latter observation, Feáns Landeira (2011: 88 n. 1) refers to Pliny the Elder (37.20.76) and Solinus’ *Polyhistor* (52.61), but in these passages it is not stated that *berillus* is an Indian word. At 17.9.8 Isidore notes that a specific kind of galingale grows in India and that it ‘is called *zinziber* in their language’.
- *Scythian*: At 14.8.2 Isidore points out that the Caucasus, due to its vastness, ‘has many different names corresponding to the variety of nations and languages (*pro gentium ac linguarum varietate*) in every direction through which it passes’. He specifies that towards the East, where it is higher and as a consequence covered by snow, it is called *Caucasus*, which means ‘white’ ‘in the/an oriental language’ (*orientali lingua*). For the same reason, he adds, the Scythians (*Scithae*) call it *Croacasm*, ‘for among them whiteness or

snow is called *casim'*. As possible sources, Spevak (2011: 144–145 nn. 534, 536) singles out Orosius' *Historiae* (1.2.36) and Pliny's *Naturalis historia* (5.27.98, 6.2.5), the latter through the filter of Solinus' *Polyhistor* (38.12, 49.6). At 9.2.44 Isidore points out that the Parthians were originally Scythian exiles, and that this can still be seen from their name, 'for in the Scythian language (*Scitico sermone*) exiles are called *parthi*'. With Reydellet (1984: 62 n. 68), one can identify possible sources in Iustinus' *Epitoma historiarum Philippicarum Pompei Trogi* (41.1.1) and in Jordanes' *Getica* (6.48).

Isidore on 'Italo-Iberian' Words

In this section, I will discuss Isidore's observations on lexical facts in the 'Italo-Iberian' varieties of Latin. When I lump 'Italian' and 'Iberian' together, I do so (1) because for these contemporary varieties Isidore seems to rely more often on first-hand observation, (2) because there seems to be a higher degree of thematic coherence among the lexical elements discussed, and (3) because there appears to have been a closer unity of circulation between the geographic zones in which these varieties were used. I will first discuss Isidore's comments on 'Iberian' words. In his treatment of measures (15.15.4–6), Isidore mentions the *actus quadratus*, 'square furrow-measure', and notes that 'the Baeticans (*Baetici*) call this measure an *arapennis* from the term *arare*'. Guillaumin & Monat (2004: 64 n. 381) note that this information derives from Columella's *Res rustica* 5.1.5. Somewhat further, he adds that 'the country people of the province of Baetica' (*prouinciae Baeticae rustici*) call this measure an *acnua*, and that 'the same Baeticans' (*idem Baetici*) also use the *porca*. According to Guillaumin & Monat (2004: 64 nn. 384–385), Isidore here relies respectively on Varro's *Res rusticae* 1.10.2 and (again) on Columella 5.1.5. At 12.7.67 Isidore notes that the Spanish (*Hispani*) call the cuckoo *ciculus* (cf. Adams 2007: 240). As André (1986: 276 n. 571) does not indicate a source for this information and as Isidore refers to *Hispani* rather than to *Baetici*, I am inclined to believe that this is a case where Isidore relies on first-hand observation of the variety used by contemporary inhabitants of the Iberian peninsula.

There are some further instances where Isidore probably relies on first-hand observation of contemporary lexical facts. Dealing with weaponry, Isidore notes at 18.6.9 that the Spanish (*Hispani*) call axes *franciscae*, and that they do so 'by derivation (*per deriuationem*) from their use by the Franks'. Cantó Llorca (2007: 89 n. 68) refers to Diesner (1975: 93), who argues that in this passage, Isidore describes a contemporary (or at least recent) factual and lexical innovation. Diesner emphasizes that apparently, the *francisca* was already adopted by the *Hispani*, i.e. already before the Visigothic domination, and suggests that Isidore may have relied on Frankish and possibly on Gothic 'informants'. Fur-

thermore, Isidore at 18.7.7 mentions a type of javelin called *cateia*, which the Spanish (*Spani*) as well as the Gauls (*Galli*, cf. below, p. 314) call *tautani*. Sofer (1927: 46–47) (not Sofer 1928 as referenced by Cantó Llorca 2007: 95 n. 83) observes that this word is only documented as a ‘Spanish-Gaulish’ word and cannot be explained etymologically in Latin. At 20.15.3 Isidore notes that the Spanish (*Hispani*) call a swing-beam *ciconia* (cf. Adams 2007: 238). Whereas *ciconia* literally means ‘stork’, the present passage is according to Lewis & Short the only evidence for the metonymical meaning ‘a transverse pole, moving upon a perpendicular post, for drawing water (etc.)’. In all of the above cases, it seems safe to assume that Isidore’s lexico-semantic information is based on first-hand observation or on the relay of linguistic informants.

As regards ‘Italian’ words, Isidore relies on Servius’ commentary on Vergil’s *Aeneid* (10.145) (André 1986: 268 n. 548) when stating at 12.7.57 that ‘in the language of Italy’ (*Itala lingua*) a *capus*, ‘capon’, is named from *capere*. Dealing with types of containers he mentions at 20.9.4 the *mozicia*, ‘coffer’, which derives from *modicia*, with *z* for *d*, ‘just as people from Italy (*Itali*) are wont to say (*solent ... dicere*) *ozie* for *hodie*’ (Burton 2008a: 41). Guillaumin (2010: 76) does not indicate a source for this passage and it can be surmised that Isidore relies on empirical observation or on an Italian ‘informant’. In this connection, it may be interesting to recall that Gregory the Great, who lived and worked in Italy, in 595 dedicated his *Moralia in Job* to Isidore’s brother Leander, and that the two of them may have maintained an epistolary exchange (Fontaine 1959: 33). This is not to say that Gregory would have been Isidore’s ‘informant’, but it shows that there was a certain circulation of information between Italy and the Iberian peninsula.

Furthermore, Isidore explains at 10.159 that a *lanista*, ‘gladiator’ or ‘executioner’, derives his name ‘from the Etruscan language (*Tusca lingua*), from ‘tear in pieces’ (*a laniando*)’. Although I have not been able to identify a precise source for this lexical information, it might ultimately go back to Varro, who frequently attributed loans to Etruscan (Collart 1978b: 16). At 9.2.84 Isidore notes that the Romans owe their name *Quirites* to the fact that Romulus was dubbed *Quirinus*, ‘since he would always use a spear which in the language of the Sabines (*Sabinorum lingua*) is called *curis*’. Reydellet (1984: 88 n. 116) notes that Isidore relies on Servius’ commentary on the *Aeneid* (1.533), but a search in Brepols’ online databases returns a number of more pertinent parallels in the so-called ‘Servius auctus’. Whereas Varro would again be a good candidate for the position of ultimate source—given his Sabine provenance and the extensive attention he pays to the Sabine language/dialect in his *De lingua Latina*—it should be pointed out that in *De lingua Latina* 5.10.73 he proposes the alternative etymology *Quirinus a Quiritibus*.

Isidore on ‘Celtic’ Words

‘Celtic’ or ‘Gaulish’ words are relatively frequent in the *Etymologiae*. At 11.1.57 Isidore notes that *toles* is the name for a part of the throat ‘in the Gaulish language’ (*Gallica lingua*). At 14.8.18 he rightly situates the Alps in Gaul, noting that they are called ‘lofty Alps’ by Vergil (*Georgics* 3.474) and that this is actually a literal translation, ‘for in the Gaulish language (*Gallorum lingua*) high mountains are called *alpes*’. Spevak (2011: 155 n. 575) notes that this information derives from Servius’ commentaries on Vergil’s *Georgics* (3.474) and *Aeneid* (10.13). Discussing square measures at 15.15.6, Isidore writes that the Gauls (*Galli*) use the *candetum*, relying here again on Columella 5.1.6 (Guillaumin & Monat 2004: 64 n. 386). At 17.7.67 Isidore mentions the alternative name *uolemis* for the *crustumia* olive, specifying that according to some, this name derives from *uolemus*, which ‘means ‘good’ and ‘large’ in the Gaulish language (*Gallica lingua*)’. As André (1981: 132–133 n. 326) indicates, this information derives from the so-called ‘Servius auctus’. Discussing types of clothing at 19.24.13, he points out that *sagum*, a coarse woolen mantle, ‘is a Gaulish term (*Gallicum nomen*)’. An ‘Irish’ word is implied at 9.2.103, where Isidore writes that the *Scotti*—that is, according to Reydellet (1984: 101 n. 140), the Irish—‘in their own language (*propria lingua*) are named from their painted (*pictus*) bodies’—thus referring to the ‘Picts’. Still according to Reydellet, Isidore may here be relying on Servius’ commentary on Vergil’s *Aeneid* (4.146).

Isidore on ‘African’ Words

In reserving a section for ‘African’ words discussed by Isidore, I merely handle a geographic criterion. In other words, this terminological choice does not imply that Isidore distinguishes an African ‘family’ of languages, but simply means that the words he discusses allegedly occur on the African continent. As a consequence, this section includes discussions of words which Isidore designates as Punic, ‘African’, and Egyptian. Although some Christian authors discuss the link which exists between Phoenician and Punic (Sect. 7.3, p. 241), Isidore does not appear to be aware of this connection or to consider it relevant.

At 15.12.4 Isidore relies on Servius’ commentary on the *Aeneid* (1.421) (Guillaumin & Monat 2004: 58 n. 337) when explaining that the term *magalia*, denoting the structures erected by Numidian peasants, derives from *magaria*—‘with one letter changed (*commutata*)’—because in Punic a new farm is called *magar*. At 8.11.23 he writes that the Babylonian idol *Bel*, whose name means ‘old’, is also worshipped by Assyrians and Africans, and that ‘hence in the Punic language (*lingua Punica*) ‘god’ is called *Bal*'. For this information Isidore could rely on Jerome’s *In Hieremiam prophetam libri sex* 4.59.4 and *Commentarii in*

prophetas minores Os. 1.2, and on Augustine's *Quaestiones in Heptateuchum* 7.16. At 17.7.13 Isidore notes that the name of the African *melopos* tree is Punic. André (1981: 93 n. 203) singles out Solinus' *Polyhistor* 24.47 as a source, but this passage does not include the comment that the term derives from Punic. 'Egyptian' words are recurrent throughout Isidore's works. Drawing on a possible first-hand observation by John Cassian (*Collationes* 18.7.2), Isidore notes in *De ecclesiasticis officiis* 2.16.9 that monks of a particular kind are called *sarabaitae* or *renuitae* 'in the language of the Egyptians' (*Aegyptiorum lingua*), i.e. Coptic, because of the fact that they 'separate themselves from coenobitic discipline and without restriction strive after their desires'.²¹

Drawing on Jerome's *Quaestiones Hebraicae in Genesim* 41.45, Isidore notes in *Etym.* 7.7.17–18 that Pharaoh gave to the patriarch Joseph, son of Jacob/Israel, the name *Saphaneth* (Gen. 41:45), which in Hebrew means 'discoverer of hidden things'. However, he argues that 'because this name was imposed on him by an Egyptian, it ought to have a rationale (*ratio*) in Pharaoh's own tongue'. Consequently—still following Jerome's information—Isidore points out that *Saphaneth* in Egyptian (*Aegyptio sermone*) means 'saviour of the world'. He provides an analogous account in *Quaestiones in uetus testamentum* Gen. 30.20. At 7.6.17 of his *Etymologiae* Isidore points out—drawing on Jerome's *Quaestiones Hebraicae in Genesim* 9.18—that the name of the Noachide Ham means 'warm', and that this indicated that his progeny would inhabit Africa, the warmest part of the world. Isidore states that as a consequence, 'still today' the Egyptian name for Egypt is *Kam*. At 8.11.84 he writes—possibly relying on Augustine, *De ciuitate Dei* 18—that the Egyptian word for the earth is *Isis* and that this derives from the goddess Isis, because the Egyptians believe that she introduced agriculture. Discussing at 15.3.6 the Latin term *thalamus*, 'sleeping room, marriage bed', Isidore notes that also in Egyptian, *thalamus* is the word for 'those places in which newlyweds go down and lie together'. In pointing this out, he is perhaps relying on Pliny the Elder 8.71.185 (Guillaumin & Monat 2004: 46 n. 209).

On the basis of all the above, it can be observed that a traditional vein in the circulation of isolated 'exotic' lexical facts was represented most importantly by the commentaries on Vergil's works (Servius) and by Pliny's encyclopaedia, which was later on summarized by Solinus. With regard to 'Semitic' languages, this traditional vein was supplemented by the exegetical lexica composed or translated/adapted by Jerome, which treated lexical facts in a somewhat more

²¹ On the word *sarabaitae*, cf. Guillaumont (1995: 91): 'Ce mot est certainement, comme Cassien lui-même l'affirme, d'origine copte, mais son étymologie reste incertaine'.

systematic way. Only seldom, these two veins of ‘bookish’ lexicography were enriched on the basis of empirical first-hand observations.

3 Contrastive Observations

While early Christian Latin authors make contrastive observations on the word level on a relatively frequent basis—often in the context of translation and in connection to the ‘proper nature’ of languages (Van Hal 2013b)—, it is important to emphasize that they do not develop any form of ‘comparative lexicography’, and do not intend to do so. Again, their contrastive observations on the word level are unsystematic and often ‘anecdotal’ in nature. As an example, one can cite a comment by Jerome on length measures, which is integrated by Isidore (*Etym.* 15.16.1). The comment is found in *Commentarii in prophetas minores* Ioel 3.18, where Jerome points out that the *Veteres Latinae* translate the Hebrew length measure *settim* as *funiculi*, ‘cords’, and that this should come as no surprise given the fact that ‘every nation (*unaquaeque gens*) calls the fixed road measures by its own names’. In order to illustrate this, he quotes the Latin *mille passus*, the Gaulish *leucae*, the Persian *parasangae*, and the German(ic) *rastae*. As will become clear from the cases discussed below, a crucial characteristic of the authors’ contrastive observations on the word level is that they are virtually all (at least originally) inserted in exegetical and/or doctrinal arguments. This obviously guides the authors’ contrastive approach towards certain salient morphological features (e.g. grammatical gender), but it also bears upon, and strongly confines, the set of words on which the authors comment.

In this connection, it is crucial to repeat (cf. Introduction, p. 13) that as a youth in Rome, Jerome was taught by the famous grammarian Aelius Donatus (*fl.* 354–363) (Holtz 1981: 37–46; cf. Lammert 1912, Brugnoli 1965), whose teaching has come down to us primarily in the form of his *Ars maior* and *Ars minor* (Holtz 1981). In his study of Jerome’s Hebrew philology, Graves (2007a) has convincingly argued that this grammatical training was essential in shaping Jerome’s approach to biblical exegesis.²² Likewise, it is the Graeco-Roman grammatical tradition, in the person of Donatus, that provided Jerome with the conceptual and terminological tools with which to approach the Semitic material. When discussing Jerome’s contrastive observations on the word level in what follows, I will consistently draw attention to the conceptual and ter-

²² For a study of Jerome’s attitude towards ‘biblical language’, cf. Meershoek (1966).

minological tools with which he had been provided during his grammatical education under Donatus. It goes without saying that Augustine, too, when contrasting different languages on the word level, relies on his grammatical training and grammaticographical activity (cf. e.g. Bellissima 1954, Collart 1971). However, the points of contact with the grammatical tradition are considerably less tangible in his case.

Jerome (and Augustine) on Grammatical Number

Jerome frequently comments on the morphological marking of number in Hebrew. In *Commentarii in prophetas minores* Os. 1.2.13 he correctly formulates the general rule that ‘wherever we read the syllable -im at the end of a Hebrew word (*in fine Hebraici sermonis*), it stands in plural number, masculine gender; where we read -oth, in plural number, feminine gender’.²³ The examples given by Jerome are *baalim*, *seraphim* and *cherubim* for the masculine plural and *sabaoth* for the feminine plural (cf. below, p. 322, for *Commentarii in Ezechiel*em 3.9.2/3). It should be emphasized that the semantic range covered by Jerome’s Hebrew examples is very narrow. The noun *baal* (בעל) literally means ‘lord’ and was used as an epithet for several Semitic deities, e.g. the Canaanite god Hadad (Day in *ABD* 1: 545). The noun *seraphim*, singular *seraph* (שרף), refers to beings which sing a hymn to Yahweh as king in Is. 6:2–3 and carry out a purification in Is. 6:6–7 (Mettinger in *DDD*: 1402). Mettinger specifies that ‘the Seraphim are now generally conceived as winged serpents with certain human attributes’. The noun *cherub* (כֶּרֶב) is a kind of catch-all term for ‘fanciful composite beings’ (Meyers in *ABD* 1: 899). Meyers specifies that although all references to *cherubim* ‘are in sacral contexts’, the only characteristic *cherubim* have in common is ‘that they are all winged beings’. The noun *sabaoth* mostly occurs in collocations such as *adonai sabaoth* (אדוני צבאות), ‘lord of (heavenly) hosts’ (Seow in *ABD* 3: 304–307). As will become clear in what follows, *seraphim*, *cherubim*, and *sabaoth* can all denote (certain classes of) angelic beings. This fact demonstrates that the linguistic ‘dataset’ on which Jerome relies is in fact very limited.

The general rule for the formation of the Hebrew plural—masculine plural on -im, feminine plural on -oth—is also stated in *Commentarii in Isaiam* 1.1.2, where Jerome explicitly designates it ‘a peculiarity of the proper nature of Hebrew’ (*estque Hebraici characteris idioma*) and reiterates the examples

23 For the terminology used by Jerome, cf. Donatus, *Ars maior* 2.7: ‘There are two numbers (*numeri sunt duo*), singular and plural (*singularis et pluralis*); singular, as in *hic sapiens*, and plural as in *hi sapientes*’.

cherubim and *seraphim* for masculine plural, and *sabaoth* for feminine plural (cf. *Commentarii in Ezechielem* 9.28.11/19 [*cherubim*], *Commentarii in Isaiam* 3.6.6/7 [*seraphim, cherubim*], *In Hieremiam prophetam libri sex* 2.77.3 [*bahalim*]). An important source for Jerome's usage of *idioma* (ἰδίωμα) as an explicit explanation for morphological differences must have been Origen, whose position Jerome describes as follows in *Ep. 26.2* (cf. Sect. 7.4, p. 250): 'Origen asserts that because of the proper nature of each language (*propter uernaculum linguae uniuscuiusque idioma*) things cannot sound the same way with others, as they sound with their natives'. While Jerome's observations on the Hebrew category of number are quite correct, it is important to repeat how restricted his lexical 'dataset' is.

Jerome on several occasions discusses cases of discrepancy between grammatical and referential number in Hebrew. In *Commentarii in Isaiam* 1.1.2 he notes that for *caelum*, 'heaven', in the verse *Attende, caelum, et loquar; audiat terra uerba oris mei*, the Hebrew text has *samaim*, plural number, which corresponds to Latin *caeli*, 'heavens'. To this he adds the observation that according to some, the Latin *caeli* is a morphological plural (*pluraliter ... dici*), but a semantic singular (*singulariter intellegi*), analogous to the cases in Latin where single cities have plural names (*Thebae, Athenae*). This remark implies that for 'some', the Hebrew word *samaim* is a *plurale tantum*, a term which Jerome does not use here, although he undoubtedly knew it from Donatus (e.g. *Ars maior* 2.10) (cf. Graves 2007a: 46). The reason for the absence of this term becomes clear in *In Hieremiam prophetam libri sex* 1.22.4, where Jerome voices his own opinion on the matter. He points out that one should not be surprised that Aquila and Symmachus have (the Greek equivalent to) *caeli* whereas the Septuagint and Theodotion have (the Greek equivalent to) *caelum*. He explains that Hebrew *samaim* is 'of common number' (*communis ... numeri*) and that both 'heavens' and 'heaven' are indicated in Hebrew by the same form. Again, he compares this peculiarity to the cases of *Thebae, Athenae, Salonae*—plural names for single cities. In spite of what the latter examples suggest, Jerome thus believes that rather than a *plurale tantum*, *samaim* is a Hebrew noun *communis numeri*. When using the latter term, he relies on Donatus, who in *Ars maior* 2.11 applies it to the Latin reflexives *sui, sibi*, and *se* (which indeed have the same form in singular and in plural). Likewise, in *Ep. 25.4*, Jerome points out that *elo[h]im*, 'Lord' or 'God', is 'of common number' (*communis numeri*), 'since both one god and several gods are called so'. He connects this case to that of *samaim* for 'heaven' as well as for 'heavens', and to plural city names in Latin.

Jerome also comments on the existence of a Hebrew dual form when explaining, in *Commentarii in Danielem* 2.7.25c, the verse *Et tradentur in manus eius usque ad tempus et tempora et dimidium temporis*. He points out that in

the present context, *tempus*, ‘time’, amounts to *annus*, ‘year’, and that *tempora* here means ‘two years’, ‘according to the proper nature of the Hebrew language (*iuxta Hebraici sermonis proprietatem*), which also has a dual number (*dualem numerum*)’. When he notes that the Hebrews ‘also’ have a dual number, it is probably implied that they have it ‘like speakers of Latin and Greek’. Jerome’s interpretation of this verse, including the morphological remark, is integrated by Augustine in *De ciuitate Dei* 20.23.1. Augustine points out that although *tempora* appears to be used ‘indefinitely’ (*indefinite*) in the Latin text, ‘the original word is in the dual number (*per dualem numerum*), which Latin does not have (*quem Latini non habent*)’. Relying on Jerome, he specifies that ‘just as the Greeks, they say that the Hebrews too know it’. As to the Latin grammatical tradition on which Jerome and Augustine rely, reference can be made to Donatus, who in *Ars maior* 2.7 classifies the Latin *ambo* and *duo* under the label of *dualis numerus*. Reference can also be made to Macrobius, who argues in *De differentiis et societatibus Graeci Latinique uerbi* that by contrast to Greek, Latin lacks a dual number—with the exceptions of *ambo* and *duo* (*KGL* 5: 599, 636) (cf. Süss 1932: 14).

Some Framing: The Arbitrariness of Grammatical Gender

Both Jerome and Augustine in their exegetical works repeatedly thematize the arbitrary nature of grammatical gender, especially where matters of faith are concerned. The notion that grammatical gender does not necessarily correspond to natural sex (or ‘natural’ sex by association in the case of inanimates) belongs to a line of argument persistent throughout the history of linguistic ideas (KilarSKI 2007; cf. Corbeill 2008, 2015). On a more general level, it should be interpreted against the background of the long-standing debate (or ‘debate’) between analogists and anomalists (e.g. Siebenborn 1976). Whereas this discussion was mostly concerned with intralingual regularity and irregularity (regarding flexion), the opposition also has possible ramifications for the relation between words and things. On this domain, the analogist position aspires to a one-to-one correspondence between the features of a referent on the one hand and of its designation on the other, whereas the anarchist position allows for irregularities in this relation.

I will here review some instances of both the analogist and the anarchist positions in this matter, which are cited by KilarSKI (2007: 25–26). To begin with, the sophist Protagoras would have argued (according to Aristotle, *De sophisticis elenchis* 173b) that because of their meaning, the masculine gender was more appropriate for words such as μῆνις, ‘anger’, and πήληξ, ‘helmet’, which are feminine nouns. Furthermore, Socrates himself would have proposed (according to Aristophanes, *Nubes* 660–670) the feminine noun ἀλεκτρύαινα, ‘hen’,

in addition to ἀλεκτρυών, which signifies both ‘cock’ and ‘hen’. As opposed to these analogist arguments, Sextus Empiricus in *Aduersus grammaticos* 142–153 singles out masculine and feminine designations for inanimate objects as evidence for the existence of anomaly in the relation between natural sex and grammatical gender. To these examples one can add the case of Varro, who is an authoritative voice for the analogist position in the Latin tradition. As Gentinetta (1961: 20–21) points out, Varro distinguishes three types of analogy in book 10 of *De lingua Latina* (viz. at 10.3.63), namely *analogia in rebus*, *in uocibus* and *in utroque*. The latter type, *in utroque*, involves analogy in the relation between *uox* and *res*, which—as Gentinetta rightly points out—is an innovation with regard to the traditional Alexandrian typology of intralingual analogy. An example of Varro’s *analogia in utroque* quoted by Gentinetta is *bonus malus, boni mali*, where designation and referent (1) are both masculine resp. male, (2) are of the same number, and (3) follow the same inflection. It is also important to note in this connection that a prominent source for our knowledge of the Stoics’ analogist approach in etymology (possibly by way of Varro) is §6 of Augustine’s early work *De dialectica* (Sect. 9.1, p. 296 f.), where Augustine refrains from subscribing to the approach outlined.

It is against the analogist position that Jerome and Augustine react, and it is for very specific doctrinal purposes that they pick up the anomalist line of argument. It should be pointed out that this strategy was already applied by Arnobius the Elder in *Aduersus nationes* 3.8 (cf. Corbeill 2015: 104–105).²⁴ As McCracken (ACW 7: 351) points out in his notes *ad locum*, Arnobius’ pupil Lactantius in *Divinae institutiones* 1.8.5–8 and 1.16.4–17 (and cf. *Epitome* 6) also urges the point that no sex is applicable to God, albeit without discussing the (dis)connection between grammatical gender and natural sex. The cases

²⁴ Arnobius develops the argument as follows: ‘Now, lest some heedless person should in turn falsely accuse us, as though we believe God whom we worship to be male (*tamquam Deum quem colimus marem esse credamus*)—the reason being, of course, that when we speak of Him we employ the masculine gender (*quod eum cum loquimur pronuntiamus genere masculino*)—let him not understand sex (*intellegat non sexum*), but rather that His name and designation are so expressed (*appellationem eius et significantiam promi*) according to the usage of everyday speech (*usu et familiaritate sermonis*). For God is not male (*non enim Deus mas est*), but His name is masculine in gender (*sed nomen eius generis masculini est*), something you in your religion cannot say. You are accustomed in your prayers to say ‘whether thou art god or goddess’ (*sive tu deus es sive dea* [cf. Gellius 2.28.3 with reference to Varro]), a doubtful expression which makes clear from the very distinction that you attribute sex to gods (*quaes dubitationis exceptio dare uos diis sexum diuincione ex ipsa declarat*).’ Arnobius also elaborates upon the arbitrariness of grammatical gender (without connection to God) in *Aduersus nationes* 1.59.

of Arnobius and Lactantius show that the ‘sexlessness’ of God had been an important topic among early Christians for a considerable time before Jerome and Augustine tackled the issue.

Jerome on Grammatical Gender and on Its Arbitrariness

As has become clear in the above, the distinction between masculine and feminine grammatical gender is already prominently involved in Jerome’s discussion of the Hebrew plural. Overall, Jerome’s (and Augustine’s) approach to the grammatical category of gender can be compared to that of Charisius (4th c.) in book 5 of his *Ars grammatica*, entitled *De idiomatibus* (Sect. 8.2, p. 268f.). Charisius there explains (*KGL* 1: 291) that one way in which ‘idioms’ may arise is

from the gender of nouns (*ex generibus nominum*), which we have contrary to the usage of the Greeks—for when we say *hic honor* for ἡ τιμή, this happens in masculine gender with us but in feminine gender with them.

An isolated peculiarity of the Hebrew language system with regard to gender is discussed in *Commentarius in Ecclesiasten* 7.28/30 (CCSL 72: 313). Jerome there explains that where Latin would express something ‘impersonally and neutrally’ (*absolute et neutraliter*)—as in *hoc quaesiuī* or in *istud uolui inuenire*—Hebrew uses a feminine form instead of a neutral one, as is reflected by the psalm verse (26:4) *Vnam petiū a Domino, hanc requiram*. Another contrastive observation with regard to gender is made in *Quaestiones Hebraicae in Genesim* 4.6–7, where Jerome points out that whereas Hebrew *hatath*, ‘sin’, is masculine, its Greek equivalent is feminine, but that in spite of this, the translators of the Septuagint rendered it in Greek ‘in masculine gender (*masculino ... genere*)’, as it stood in the Hebrew text.

Throughout his exegetical writings, Jerome applies the arbitrariness of grammatical gender to a relatively wide range of ‘higher’ or ‘holy’ entities. In *Ep. 18B.1.2–3* he points out that *seraphim*—the Hebrew name for a class of angels (cf. above, p. 317)—is rendered in Greek as a neuter by the Septuagint, Aquila and Theodotion, but as a masculine by Symmachus. He subsequently emphasizes that ‘one should not believe that sex exists among God’s angels’, and in order to refute this opinion he refers to the Holy Spirit, the designation for which is of different grammatical gender in Hebrew, Greek, and Latin. In Hebrew (*secundum proprietates linguae Hebraeae*), he argues, it is designated by the feminine *ruach*, in Greek by the neuter τὸ πνεῦμα, and in Latin by the masculine *spiritus*. According to Jerome, this demonstrates that when the grammatical gender of terms for ‘higher things’ is morphologically marked,

'this does not so much indicate sex (*non tam sexum significari*), but rather it is the proper nature of the language concerned that resounds (*quam idioma sonare linguae*)'. Here again, morphological differences are explicitly connected to the 'proper nature' of a language, in function of a theological point. In giving his ultimate argument, Jerome states that even God, who is invisible and incorruptible, 'is referred to in masculine gender in almost all languages, even though no sex applies to Him'.

Both with regard to angels and with regard to the Holy Spirit, the same argument is developed by Jerome on a number of other occasions. In *Commentarii in Ezechielem* 3.9.2/3 he points out that although it has been rendered in Greek as the neuter plural τά χερουβέιμ, the Hebrew *cherub* is a masculine form with the regular masculine plural *cherubim* (cf. above, p. 317). Jerome subsequently makes it clear that the grammatical gender of *cherubim* does not mean that sex would apply to the servants of God, but that this is simply due to the fact that 'everything is designated in a different gender (*diuersis ... generibus*) according to the proper nature of its language (*iuxta linguae suae proprietatem*)'. In *Commentarii in Isaiam* 11.40.9/11 Jerome states that no one should be misled by the fact that *rua codsa* [*ruach qodesha*], the Hebrew term for the Holy Spirit, is a feminine form, 'for there is no sex in the Godhead'. He furthermore argues that it is for this reason that the Holy Spirit is designated in the three possible grammatical genders 'in the three principal languages' (*in tribus principalibus linguis*) (Sect. 7.2, p. 233), 'in order for us to know that what is essentially different (*diuersum*) belongs to no actual gender (*nullius ... generis*)'. The central argument of these terminologically interesting passages is that the arbitrary nature of grammatical gender is demonstrated by the differences occurring in this category across languages, as becomes especially clear in the context of Bible translation and interpretation.

Augustine on the Arbitrariness of Grammatical Gender

Apparently relying in part on an isolated remark in Hilary's *Tractatus super Psalmos* 118.5.10—'for *lex* is so called in feminine gender by us, while it is called νόμος in Greek and thus pronounced in masculine gender by them'—Augustine like Jerome elaborates on the arbitrariness of grammatical gender in *In Iohannis euangelium tractatus* 38.11.²⁵ The actual purpose of Augustine's exposition is to show that in Ioh. 8:25, 'I am the beginning', Greek has the

²⁵ For a good understanding of this complicated passage—which deals with Ioh. 8:25, *Dixit eis Jesus: Principium, quia et loquor uobis*—it seems useful to quote the Latin text in full: *Et illi semper terrena sapientes et semper secundum carnem audientes et respondentes, quid ei dixerunt? Tu quis es? Non enim cum dixisti: Nisi credideritis quia ego sum, addidisti*

feminine form ἀρχή and can thus differentiate between the nominative and the accusative cases, whereas the Latin version has the neuter *principium* and can thus make no distinction. From this Augustine infers that the question-answer couple in the Bible passage concerned should be understood not just as ‘Who are you?’—‘The beginning’, but as ‘What are we to believe you are?’—‘Believe that I am the beginning’, the latter sentence making use of a Greek infinitive clause with a subject in the accusative case.

In order to corroborate this point, Augustine demonstrates—from a ‘cross-linguistic’ perspective—that grammatical gender is merely arbitrary, by reminding his readers of the facts (1) that ἀρχή, the Greek equivalent for the Latin neuter *principium* (Ioh. 8:25), is of feminine gender, (2) that *lex* is of feminine gender while its Greek counterpart νόμος is masculine, and (3) that both *sapientia* and its Greek equivalent σοφία are of feminine gender. In an argument analogous to that of Jerome (cf. above, p. 321f.), Augustine subsequently observes that

the usage of speech (*consuetudo locutionis*) diversifies the gender of words (*uariat genera uocabulorum*) across different languages (*per diuersas linguis*) for the following reason, namely because in the realities themselves one does not retrieve sex (*quia in ipsis rebus non inuenis sexum*).

In order to definitively demonstrate this, he argues that the reality of ‘wisdom’ (*sapientia*) is not actually female, since Christ is called the ‘wisdom of God’ (*Dei sapientia*), while Christ is denoted in the masculine gender and wisdom in the feminine gender.

quid esses. Quis es, ut credamus? Et ille: Principium. Ecce quod est esse. Principium mutari non potest; principium in se manet, et innuat omnia; principium est, cui dictum est: Tu autem idem ipse es, et anni tui non deficient. Principium, ait, quia et loquor uobis. Principium me credite, ne moriamini in peccatis uestris. Tamquam enim in eo quod dixerunt: Tu quis es? nihil aliud dixerint quam: Quid te esse credimus? Respondit: Principium; id est, principium me credite. In Graeco namque eloquio discernitur, quod non potest in Latino. Apud Graecos enim feminini generis est principium, sicut apud nos lex generis feminini est, quae apud illos est masculini; sicut sapientia et apud nos et apud illos generis feminini est. Consuetudo locutionis ideo per diuersas linguis uariat genera uocabulorum, quia in ipsis rebus non inuenis sexum. Non enim sapientia uere femina est, cum Christus sit Dei Sapientia, et Christus appelletur genere masculino, sapientia feminino. Cum ergo dicent Iudei: Tu quis es? ille qui sciebat esse ibi quosdam credituros, et ideo dixisse: Tu quis es, ut scirent quid illum credere deberent, respondit: Principium; non tamquam diceret: Principium sum; sed tamquam diceret: Principium me credite. Quod in sermone Graeco, ut dixi, euidenter appetat, ubi feminini generis est principium.

A slightly heterogeneous instance in Augustine's works is concerned with the connection between designations and natural sex in a less straightforward way. In accordance with his general inclination to differentiate between synonyms or near-synonyms (cf. e.g. Marrou 1958: 24), Augustine emphasizes over and again that as a consequence of the lexico-semantic constellation in Hebrew, the biblical source language (e.g. *more locutionis Hebraicae, proprietate Hebraicae linguae*), the Latin Bible text uses *mulier*, 'wife, spouse', where one would normally use *femina*, 'woman' (cf. Hiltbrunner 2008).²⁶ For Augustine, the importance of this lexico-semantic peculiarity lies in the fact that in biblical Latin, *mulier* merely indicates the natural sex of a woman, and not 'the loss of her virginity', which is implied when it is used in 'everyday Latin'. An illustrative example can be found in *In Iohannis euangeliū tractatus* 10.2, where Augustine comments upon Ioh. 2:12, which describes how Christ 'and his mother and his brothers and his disciples' went down to Capernaum. Augustine emphasizes that 'his brothers' is a characteristic expression of 'biblical language' and does not necessarily indicate boys or men from the same mother. This would be impossible since it would mean that Mary, virgin and mother, actually gave birth again, whereas 'it is from her that the dignity of virgins derives'. Augustine explains that 'this female (*femina*) could be a mother (*mater*) but could not be a wife (*mulier*)', and that due to another characteristic of biblical language, 'she was called a wife (*mulier*) with reference to her female sex (*secundum femineum sexum*), not with reference to the breach of her virginal integrity (*non secundum corruptionem integritatis*)' (cf. Mohrmann 1948: 118).

Without substantial variation and at times very concisely, the argument is frequently repeated by Augustine himself.²⁷ It is also intensively received and integrated by later Christian authors, namely by Quodvultdeus (*Liber promissionum et praedictorum Dei* 3.4.5, *Sermo* 3.3.15–17), Vincentius of Lérins (*Excerpta e sancto Augustino* 5 [CCSL 64: 213]), and Isidore of Seville (*Etym.* 11.2.20).

²⁶ Cf. Jerome, who points out in *Ep. 69.5.5* that '*mulier*, i.e. γυνή, in accordance with the ambiguity of the Greek word (*iuxta Graeci sermonis ambiguitatem*) in all of these passages should rather be understood as *uxor*'. The problematic confusion between *mulier* and *femina* (most importantly for Eve and Mary) is also repeatedly commented upon by Tertullian (*De monogamia* 8.5, *De oratione* 21.1–22.3, *De virginibus uelandis* 5.1–5, 7.1–4), who like Jerome but unlike Augustine reduces this confusion not to the Hebrew but to the Greek source text (i.e. γυνή).

²⁷ Namely in *Expositio epistulae ad Galatas* 30.1, *Contra Faustum* 23.7, *Ep. 140.3.6*, *Sermones* 10D/162C.6, 49A.1, 51.2.3, 52.11.18, 186.3, 291.4, *De trinitate* 2.5.8, 12.5.5, *Locutiones in Heptateuchum* 1.77, 1.88, 4.104.

Undoubtedly, the popularity of this contrastive observation should be explained with reference to its doctrinal (mariological) relevance from a Christian perspective.

Contrastive Lexicographical Observations in Jerome

Jerome also makes some more specific contrastive comments on morphological and lexical matters. In *Commentarii in epistulas Paulinas* Gal. 3.5.18 he notes that by contrast to Greek, Latin does not at all know an article (ἄρθρον). This observation can be connected to a number of prominent voices in the Latin grammatical tradition, which rendered ἄρθρον in Latin as *articulus*. More specifically, Donatus in *Ars maior* 2.1 notes that ‘speakers of Latin (*Latini*) do not count (*non annumerant*) the article’ among the parts of speech. However, somewhat more nuanced accounts than Donatus’ and Jerome’s can also be found in the grammatical tradition. Quintilian notes at 1.4.19 that ‘our language (*noster sermo*) does not feel its lack of articles (*articulos non desiderat*)’, and these are therefore distributed among other parts of speech (*ideoque in alias partes orationis sparguntur*), namely pronouns (Schöpsdau 1992: 126–127), and Servius in his *Commentarius in artem Donati* (KGL 4: 428) that ‘we are not entirely devoid of the article (*nos articulo non penitus caremus*), but we count it together with the pronoun (*sed in pronomine computamus*)’ (Holtz 1981: 131–132 n. 55) (cf. Denecker & Swiggers forthc.).

Relying on Donatus’ *Ars minor* 9 (cf. *Ars maior* 2.17) (Martí 1974: 104; Holtz 1981: 39; Graves 2007a: 15), Jerome points out in *Ep. 20.5.1–2* that just as there are various interjections with different pragmatic values in Latin (*ua* for joy, *papae* for admiration, *heu* for grief, *st* to demand silence), something comparable is known to speakers of Hebrew—‘among the other characteristics of their language’ (*inter reliquias proprietates linguae suae*).²⁸ He explains that when speakers of Hebrew want to pray to God for something, they use a verb with imploring mood (*uerbum petentis affectu*), followed by *anna Domine*—*Domine* being Jerome’s rendering of *adonai*. He goes on to explain that *osi* is a Hebrew imperative meaning ‘save’, and that *anna* is an imploring interjection (*interiectio deprecantis*).²⁹ Jerome moves on to explain that when these two elements, *osi* and *anna*, are joined to a *compositum uerbum*, the result is *osianna* and hence *osanna*. It is interesting to note that Jerome gives a very

²⁸ I deal in some more detail with Jerome’s observations on Hebrew interjections in Denecker (forthc.c).

²⁹ This characterization of *anna* can be connected to *Commentarii in prophetas minores* Ion. 4.3, where Jerome writes that ‘this interjection of imploring (*interiectio deprecantis*) to me seems to signify a mood of flattering (*significare blandientis affectum*)’.

precise account of the transition from *osianna* to *osanna*, making use of the traditional concept of elision:

you will say *osianna* or, as we say, *osanna* with elision of the vowel in the middle (*media uocali littera elisa*), as we are used to do in verses (*sicuti facere solemus in uersibus*), when we scan (*scandimus*) *mene incepto desistere uictam* [Aen. 1.34] as *men' incepto*. For the *aleph*, the first letter of the second word (*littera prima uerbi sequentis*), excluded the final letter of the first word when it ran into it (*extremam prioris uerbi inueniens exclusit*).

Interestingly, Luebeck (1872: 176) identified a plausible source for Jerome's comment in Marius Victorinus' *Ars grammatica* (KGL 6: 22), which has it that 'one vowel is elided each time (*eliduntur ... uocales singulae*) when two of them ran into each other (*cum duae concurrerunt*), as in *me n' incepto desistere uictam*, not *me ne*, and in *te n' inquit miserande puer*, not *te ne*'. Jerome was acquainted with Marius Victorinus' works (cf. Hagendahl 1958: *passim*) and devotes an entry of his *De uiris illustribus* to him (§101). Given the identity in terminology (*elidere*) and example (Aen. 1.34), it seems safe to assume that Jerome relies on Marius Victorinus, provided that the two of them do not rely on a lost common source—Donatus?

Jerome makes a number of further specific observations on interjections in Hebrew, some of which have already been touched upon in the above. In *Commentarii in prophetas minores* Soph. 1.7 Jerome notes that where (some of) the *Veteres Latinae* have *timete* and his own translation has *silete*, 'in the Hebrew text there is an interjection demanding silence (*in Hebraeo interiectio est imperantis silentium*), which the comical writers (*comici*) also frequently use'. With regard to the latter phrase, one could think for instance of Donatus' commentary on Terence as a remainder of the tradition of literary commentaries on comical writers on which Jerome possibly relies. In *Commentarii in Isaiam* 15.55.1/2 Jerome deals with the Hebrew word *oi*. He points out that this word is *ambiguum* and that it is either 'an interjection of shouting' (*interiectionem uocantis*) or amounts to the Latin interjection of complaining *uae*. However, he notes that in the passage at issue 'it should not be read with the mood of complaining, but of shouting' (*nequaquam plangentis legitur, sed uocantis affectu*).

Overall, it can be observed from Jerome's discussions of Hebrew interjections that he makes a systematic use of terminology from the Latin tradition of grammars and literary commentaries. Apart from the aspects already pointed out, I would like to draw attention to the collocations consisting of *interiectio* or *affectus* followed by a present participle in the genitive form in order to indicate

the ‘emotion’, ‘mood’, or pragmatic value expressed by the interjections at issue. For the term *affectus* at least, Jerome could rely directly on Donatus, who in *Ars minor* 9 (cf. above, p. 325) defines the interjection as ‘the part of speech (*parts orationis*) which expresses a mood of the mind (*significans mentis affectum*) by means of an unformed sound (*uoce incondita*)’.

Jerome on Lexical Borrowing

A very specific category of contrastive observations in Jerome’s works consists of cases where he explains lexico-semantic convergences between different languages (mostly Latin and Hebrew) as cases of lexical borrowing. One category consists of cases where Latin borrows words from Hebrew. Jerome presumably considers these as ‘immediate’ borrowings, not as words which have persisted genealogically from the Hebrew protolanguage into Latin. A relevant instance can be found in *Liber interpretationis Hebraicorum nominum* 26, where Jerome notes that Hebrew *cane* (קָנָה), ‘reed, cane’ (DCH), corresponds to Latin *calamus*, ‘reed-pen’, and observes that Latin *canna*, ‘reed, cane’, ‘has been borrowed (*sumptum est*) from the Hebrew language’ (cf. Isidore, *Etym.* 17.7.57). Likewise, in *Quaestiones Hebraicae in Genesim* 24.22 Jerome points out that the Hebrew word *secel* (לְקַשׁ), which he defines as a weight measure equal to an ounce, ‘is corruptly (*corrupte*) called *siclus* in the Latin language’. This statement implies that the Latin word *siclus* is a lexical borrowing from Hebrew, which has undergone morphological changes (‘corruptions’) in the process of borrowing. Jerome’s observation with regard to *siclus* was integrated by Eucherius in book 2 of his *Instructiones ad Salonium* (CCSL 66: 211–212) and by Isidore in *Etym.* 16.25.18.

A more problematic category—when faced with Jerome’s global framework of language history—consists of words which have allegedly been borrowed from Latin (or Greek) into Hebrew. In *Liber interpretationis Hebraicorum nominum* 58 Jerome states that Hebrew *semel* (סְמֵל), which means ‘image, icon, statue’ (DCH), corresponds to Latin *idolum* and notes that this is—or might be (*sit*)—‘a Latin word in the Hebrew volumes, deriving from *similitudo*, after which *simulacra* [‘portraits, statues’] are also called’ (cf. Isidore, *Etym.* 8.11.6–7).³⁰ Furthermore, Jerome points out in *Commentarii in Isaiam* 3.7.14 (cf. *Aduersus Iouinianum* 1.32, *Quaestiones Hebraicae in Genesim* 24.43) that the Hebrew word *alma* (עַלְמָה) means not simply ‘girl’ or ‘virgin’, but ‘hidden’ or ‘protected

30 Although it is true that the Latin words *semel* and *similis* are etymologically related (De Vaan 2008: 553), there is no evidence that the Hebrew *semel* would actually derive from Latin.

virgin'. He specifies that also in Punic—‘which is said to spring from the wells of the Hebrews’ (Sect. 7.3, p. 241)—a virgin is called *alma* and that even in Latin, a ‘saintly’, ‘holy’, or ‘pure’ woman (*sancta*) is called *alma*. In the same connection, Jerome in *Quaestiones Hebraicae in Genesim* 24.43 explicitly connects the specific meaning of Hebrew *alma* to the *idioma linguae Hebraeae*. Kamesar—who traces the ‘philological argument’ concerning the virgin from Is. 7:14 in the Greek and Latin Christian tradition—points out (1990: 51) that the passage in point, ‘as it is rendered by the Septuagint, constituted an important testimony of the Virgin Birth in early Christianity’ (cf. Hayward 1995: 185–187). The doctrinal (mariological) ramifications of the precise semantic value of Hebrew *alma* obviously explain its relevance from a Christian perspective.

In the context of this argument, Jerome in the same passage observes on a general level that ‘the Hebrews use words from nearly all languages’ (*omniumque paene linguarum uerbis utuntur Hebraei*). In order to corroborate his remarkable statement, Jerome mentions three relevant cases. His first piece of evidence is the Greek word φορέῖον, ‘litter, sedan-chair’ (Liddell, Scott & Jones), which according to Jerome occurs in this way in the Hebrew source text of Song of Songs (3:9) (*quod et in Hebraeo ita legimus*).³¹ The two other alleged pieces of evidence which Jerome cites are the Latin nouns *nugae* and *mensura*, which he argues ‘the Hebrews designate in the same way and with the same meanings’ (*Hebraei eodem modo et eisdem appellant sensibus*). The connection which Jerome constructs between *nugae* and the Hebrew *nugim* (נוּגִים, from the root נָגַע) of Soph. 3:18 has been discussed in Sect. 2.2 (p. 76) and 7.3 (p. 239). The Latin noun *mensura*, ‘measure’, actually corresponds both in form and meaning with the Hebrew משורה (*DCH*). In connection to Jerome’s general framework of language genealogy (Sect. 7.3, p. 238f.), it should presumably be understood that there are some words going back to Hebrew, the ‘primeval language’ and genealogical ‘protolanguage’, which have persisted in other, post-Babelic languages, and have subsequently been ‘borrowed back’ into (post-Babelic) Hebrew.

³¹ Indeed, Dobbs-Allsopp (2005: 67) notes that the Hebrew Old Testament *hapax legomenon* ‘*appiryōn* (אֲפִירְיוֹן)

Contrastive Lexicographical Observations in Augustine

It has been pointed out in the Introduction (p. 14) that Augustine had some acquaintance with Punic, and that he could combine this disparate knowledge to the information on Hebrew which he found in Jerome in order to use it in his biblical exegesis. It should be stressed that while Augustine mentions several isolated Punic words (Cox 1988: 84–92; Jongeling 2004–2010), he does not offer a systematic lexico-semantic description of the Punic language. Here again, it can be pointed out that Augustine frequently quotes a Punic word in order to make a particular exegetical point. Presumably drawing in part on Jerome (*Ep.* 22.31.2, 121.6.13), Augustine in *Sermo* 113.2.2 contrasts the meaning of the Hebrew word *mammona* to its Punic cognate *mammon* (Sect. 7.3, p. 246). He points out that while the Punic word corresponds to Latin *lucrum*, ‘gain’, its Hebrew counterpart corresponds to Latin *diuitiae*, ‘riches’.

In *Sermo* 3D.8 Augustine contrasts the words for ‘God’ in three different languages, while elaborating on the way the internal *uerbum* is uttered to someone else in the form of a *uox* (Sect. 4.1, p. 128). Depending merely on the language of the addressee, the speaker will denote God in Latin as *Deus*, in Punic as *ȳlim*, or in Greek as *theos*. The *uerbum* that is in the heart, Augustine argues to the contrary, is neither Greek, nor Punic, nor Latin (cf. Denecker & Partoens 2014: 115). In *Enarrationes in Psalmos* 123.8 Augustine notes that *forsitan*, ‘perhaps’, in the verse *forsitan pertransiit anima nostra*, corresponds to the Greek *ἄρα*, a word expressing doubt, the value of which it renders less than perfectly. In order to explain what exactly *ἄρα* means, he refers to the Punic word *iar*, which as a noun means ‘wood’, but as an interjection means ‘do you think?’, and as such indicates doubt. Augustine subsequently states that this sense can be expressed in Latin by *putas* in a question, which is common (*usitate*) but no correct Latin (*Latine non ita dicitur*). As a consequence, it could not be used in the Latin version of the Bible (which cannot contain incorrect words) and the translator(s) had to use *forsitan* instead.

A remarkable contrastive observation on lexical matters—which actually amounts to the ‘abuse’ of a coincidental formal correspondence—in *Epistulae ad Romanos inchoata expositio* 13 relates to Augustine’s teachings on Trinity and salvation. In the passage concerned, Augustine describes a situation allegedly observed by his predecessor, bishop Valerius. One Northern African countryman is described addressing another with *salus*, which in Latin is the word for ‘salvation’ but also a greeting formula. One of the countrymen knows both Latin and Punic, and, on being asked what *salus* means, replies that in Punic, it means ‘three’. Valerius infers from this that ‘salvation’ in Latin corresponds to ‘three’—and hence to Trinity—in Punic, and that this ‘agreement

of languages' (*concinentia linguarum*) is no coincidence but a result of divine providence, 'so that when 'salvation' is designated in Latin, 'three' is understood by speakers of Punic, and when speakers of Punic designate 'three' in their language, 'salvation' is understood in Latin.' This anecdote is subsequently connected to Matth. 15:22–27, the story about a Canaanite woman who prays for the salvation (*salus*) of her daughter. Augustine explains that Punic countrymen identify themselves as *Chanani* and that this ethnonym is—*corrupta ... una littera*—the same as *Chananaei*. He thus equals Punic to 'Canaanite'. Augustine is consequently able to argue that when the Canaanite woman prays for salvation (*salus*), she actually prays for 'three' or Trinity, given the fact that the Canaanite woman represents the heathen nations and that Latin was the predominant language among the heathen nations (*Romana lingua ... caput gentium inuenta est*) at the time of Christ's coming. Augustine himself leaves it undecided whether this lexical convergence between Latin and Punic is a coincidence or intended by divine providence, but he readily uses it to illustrate his theological point: salvation entirely depends on God, who is triune.

A last contrastive observation can be found in Augustine's *In Iohannis euangelium tractatus* 55.1 and relates to Christian doctrine on the resurrection of Christ. In his *Commentarii in Isaiam* 10.31.4/5 Jerome had pointed out that for *transiens* in the verse at issue, the Hebrew source text has *phase*, and three Greek translations in addition to the Septuagint have ὑπερβαίνων. He interprets this as evidence for the fact that the feast of *pascha*, i.e. the *phase* of the Lord, 'does not mean the suffering (*passio*) of the Lord, but His transition (*transitus*)'. In *In Iohannis euangelium tractatus* Augustine relies on Jerome when pointing out that contrary to what some believe, *pascha* is not a Greek but a Hebrew noun, but that 'nevertheless a certain agreement of both languages (*quaedam congruentia utrarumque linguarum*) occurred in this noun'. He explains that because 'to suffer' (*pati*) is πάσχειν in Greek, *pascha* has been interpreted as *passio*, 'passion, suffering', while at the same time Hebrew *pascha* means 'crossing, transition' (*transitus*), and that it is for this reason that the feast of *pascha* was celebrated for the first time at the occasion of the exodus and the crossing of the Red Sea. While pointing out, possibly on the basis of Jerome's philological observations, that the Greek etymology for *pascha* is incorrect, Augustine does not seem to dismiss it entirely due to its undeniable importance within the Christian tradition. Augustine's argument was integrated by Eucherius in book 2 of his *Instructiones ad Salonium* (CCSL 66: 204–205) and by Isidore in *De ecclesiasticis officiis* 1.32.2.

Bible Translation, Polysemy, and Untranslatable Words: Hilary (and Jerome)

Unsurprisingly, a number of contrastive lexicographical observations occur in the direct context of Bible translation. The cases which will be discussed in this section closely relate to those discussed in Section 7.4 (p. 247f.), but I will here focus on problems of (un)translatability and polysemy on the word level. Hilary of Poitiers notes in *Tractatus super Psalmos* 54.11 that the imperative form *prae-cipita* in the verse at issue does not correspond well to its Greek counterpart καταπόντισον, adding the general observation that ‘as is often the case, the Latin language (*Latinitas*) has not fully expressed (*non elocuta est*) the proper meaning (*proprietatem*) of the Hebrew and of the Greek word’. In *Tractatus super Psalmos* 2.2 Hilary emphasizes the importance of the inspired Mosaic tradition, which enabled the translators who procured the Greek Septuagint to render, in a proper and unambiguous way, ‘ambiguous phrasings of the Hebrew language’ (*ambigua linguae Hebraicae dicta*). He argues that thanks to their participation in the Mosaic tradition, the Seventy translators—unlike other Bible translators subsequent to them—‘were able to control (*temperantes*) this manifold meaning of the words (*multimodam illam sermonum intellegentiam*)’. In specific terms, this means that they were able to choose the correct Greek equivalent for Hebrew words which have various possible meanings but which are used with only one of these in the context at issue.

In order to demonstrate the importance of the inspired Mosaic tradition in the translation of the Septuagint (cf. Benoit 1963), Hilary quotes ‘one example of the ambiguity of the Hebrew language (*ambiguitatis ... linguae Hebraicae*)’. This example is *bresith* (בראשית), the very first word of Genesis which Hilary argues ‘has in itself three meanings’, namely ‘in the beginning’, ‘in the head’, and ‘in the son’. Whereas the Seventy translators chose the first option, later translators rendered it differently. ‘And due to this kind of ambiguity (*secundum hanc ambiguitatem*)’, Hilary concludes, ‘confusion (*confusio*) has been brought about by them [the later translators] throughout the entire translation’ (tr. after Kamesar 2005: 271–272; cf. Denecker *et al.* 2012: 434–435). Apparently, ambiguity and polysemy to Hilary’s mind are characteristic of the Hebrew language. Within the context of Bible translation, this ambiguity is put to use in arguing that the Septuagint is the only legitimate translation, since its translators were the only ones to be guided by the Mosaic tradition and, thus, to be able to choose the correct Greek equivalent for Hebrew words with various possible meanings.

The problematic polysemy of Hebrew is also commented upon by Jerome, who extensively deals with problems of translation in *Ep. 57* and 106 (cf. Marti 1974). In *Tractatus in Marci euangelium* 2 (CCSL 78: 464), for instance, Jerome

points out that the Hebrew word *naum* means both ‘consolation’ and ‘proper, decorated’, explaining this by the fact that ‘the Hebrew language has manifold meanings (*multiplices ... intellegentias*)’ and that ‘a different sense (*diuersus ... sensus*) is also made out according to a difference in pronunciation (*diuersitatem pronuntiantis*)’. By the latter observation he obviously refers to the fact that in his days, vowels were not normally indicated in written Hebrew (Sect. 10.4, p. 378f.).

Bible Translation and Untranslatable Words: Augustine

Augustine makes a general remark on the (un)translatability of the biblical text in *De uera religione* 50.99 (Marti 1974: 102–112). With reference to the *proprietates* of the language of the Bible—either Hebrew or ‘biblical Latin’ influenced by the source languages—he states that ‘every language has certain characteristic ways of expression of its own (*sua quaedam propria genera locutionum*)’ and that these, ‘when they are transferred (*transferuntur*) into another language, appear incongruous (*absurda*)’. This statement clearly relates to Augustine’s contrastive approach in terms of *locutiones* or *idiomata* which he maintains in his *Locutiones in Heptateuchum* and which has been introduced extensively in Sect. 8.2 (p. 267f.). Augustine is more specific in *De doctrina Christiana* 2.11.16, where he points out that one often finds Hebrew words untranslated in Latin Bible versions, such as *amen*, *alleluia*, *racha*, and *osanna*. He argues that there are two possible explanations for this fact. Either these Hebrew words could be translated but are preserved in their original form ‘because of their more solemn authority’ (*propter sanctiorem auctoritatem*)—this is the case with *amen* and *alleluia* (cf. Isidore, *De ecclesiasticis officiis* 1.13.1)—or they are simply ‘said to be incapable of being translated into another language’—this, in turn, is the case with the interjections *racha* and *osanna* (cf. Schirner 2015: 25). With regard to the latter possibility, he furthermore notes that ‘certain words in particular languages’ (*quaedam uerba certarum linguarum*)

cannot move over by way of translation (*per interpretationem transire non possint*) into the usage of another language (*in usum alterius linguae*).

This is especially true of interjections, which signify emotion (*motum animi significant*), rather than an element of clearly conceived meaning (*sententiae conceptae ullam particulam*); two such words, it is said, are *racha*, a word expressing anger, and *osanna*, a word expressing joy.

Relying presumably on Jerome’s *Ep. 20.5.1–2* (cf. above, p. 325f.)—he invokes the authority of *nonnulli ... qui Hebraeam linguam nouerunt*—Augustine in *In Iohannis euangeliū tractatus* 51.2 points out that the Hebrew *hosanna* is an

'utterance of imploring' (*uox ... obsecrantis*), 'which rather indicates a mental affection (*magis affectum indicans*)³² than signifying some reality (*quam rem aliquam significans*)'. He subsequently compares the use of *hosanna* in Hebrew to a number of Latin interjections with their respective emotional or pragmatic values, namely *heu* (*dolentes*), *uah* (*cum delectamur*), and *o* (*cum miramur; nihil significat, nisi mirantis affectum*). In addition, he refers again to the Hebrew *racha* of Matth. 5:22, which he notes could not be translated into Greek nor into Latin, and which 'is also considered an interjection, indicating the affection of indignation (*affectum indignantis*)'.

Augustine also comments on the untranslatability of *racha* in *De sermone Domini in monte* 1.9.23. Allegedly relying on the advice of a native speaker of Hebrew, he again invokes the value of interjections, which is pragmatic rather than lexical-referential, and in doing so he draws on the grammatical tradition. These words—such as *heu* and *hem* in Latin—he argues, 'are peculiar to individual languages (*quae uoces quarumque linguarum sunt propriae*) and cannot easily be transferred into another language (*nec in aliam linguam facile transferuntur*)' (cf. Isidore, *Etym.* 1.14). In *In Iohannis euangelium tractatus* 41.3 he argues that whereas it would have been possible to translate the Hebrew *amen* into Greek or Latin—*amen dico uobis* could have been turned into *uerum dico uobis*—the different Bible translators did not dare to do so. The word remained in its original form 'in order to possess honour due to the veil of secrecy (*uelamento secreti*)' and 'not in order to be denied, but in order not to become vile by being uncovered (*ne uilesceret nudatum*)'. In accordance with Augustine's own statement in *De doctrina Christiana* 2.11.16, it can be inferred from the material reviewed that in Augustine's opinion, some Hebrew words cannot be translated into (Greek or) Latin, either because they are interjections and as such highly 'idiomatic' entities, or because they are sacred terms (*amen, alleluia*) and their sanctity would be detracted from when they would be translated into a language different from Hebrew.³³

³² Although the CCSL edition (36: 440) has *iudicans* and provides no alternatives in the critical apparatus, this phrase in my opinion only makes sense if we read *indicans*.

³³ The latter possibility is elaborated upon in a couple of works of later date which rather explicitly position themselves in an 'Augustinian' tradition. The argument is connected to the debate centering on *homoousios* (Sect. 4.1, p. 130f.) by the anonymous author of *Collatio Augustini cum Pascentio*. The author has Augustine argue at 15.90–99 that neither speakers of Latin nor barbarians are allowed to translate the universally used Hebrew words *amen* and *alleluia* into their own languages. The author subsequently has Augustine account for this by stating that 'not in Africa or anywhere in *barbaria*, but in Syria and Greece, where the very flesh of the Lord wanted to be born from the virgin, was it fitting or

Isidore: A Closer Bond between Latin and Greek?

The notion of a closer bond between Latin and Greek (the ‘Aeolic hypothesis’; Sect. 7.3, p. 244f., and 10.2, p. 356f.) is prominent—although implicit—in the works of Isidore of Seville. It should be stressed immediately that Isidore does not propose a systematic and coherent notion of bond. As a consequence, it remains unclear whether the connection between Latin and Greek which underlies several of his etymologies should be understood in terms of genealogy, borrowing, or of parallel developments in the sense of a *Sprachbund* (cf. Adams 2013: 870). This is presumably due to the fact that the encyclopaedist relies heavily on the grammatical tradition (Fontaine 1959: 357), which included some works demonstrating a closer bond between Latin and Greek. However, a central ultimate source for Isidore’s dispersed remarks on this connection must have been Varro.

Collart (1954: 105–106; tr. mine; and cf. Gitner 2015) indeed points out that Varro ‘readily connects the Latin to the Greek vocabulary, either in order to show that they are cognate, or even more often to signal—sometimes erroneously—loans which have been made in Latin from Greek’. He explains (1954: 211–212) that the assumed linguistic connection between Latin and Greek is based on an assumed historical-ethnic connection between ‘Romans’ and Greeks, prominently but not exclusively in the person of the Arcadian hero Evander, son of Mercury and the prophetic goddess Carmentis, who came to Italy and settled on the banks of the Tiber.³⁴ With regard to Varro’s thought on Latin ‘loans’ from Greek, Collart (1978b: 15–16; tr. mine) notes that the polymath appears to have made a distinction between (1) an ‘ancient legacy’ which Latin received from the *Graeci antiqui* (*Argiui*, *Pelasgi*, *Arcades*, *Aeolii*, *Siculi*) when Evander came to Italy, and (2) a ‘series of recent loans’, namely technical and

necessary to fix the words of faith succinctly (*uerba fidei compendiose firmare*). Likewise, Cassiodorus in *Expositio Psalmorum* 147.12 argues that there is so much honour (*tantus honor*) to the Hebrew word *alleluia* ‘that although it is concealed in the Hebrew language (*in Hebraea lingua reconditum*), still it does not fit in with any other language when it is translated (*nullo tamen constet alio sermone translatum*)’. Cassiodorus then rhetorically elaborates on the untranslatability of *alleluia* by writing that ‘to this the speaker of Greek clings, and speakers of Latin, Chaldean, Syriac, Persian, Arabic; to this clings every nation on earth’.

³⁴ Collart (1954: 105–106) also points out that there was already a tradition connecting Latin to Greek prior to Varro. Two important representatives mentioned by Collart (1954: 207–208) are (1) Cato the Elder, who in his *Origines* would have established a connection between Latin and the Aeolic dialect which Evander spoke, and (2) a certain Hypsicrates, who is mentioned by Varro in *De lingua Latina* 5.16.88 and who wrote a work on the connection between Greek and Latin (cf. Aulus Gellius, *Noctes Atticae* 16.12.5).

scientific Greek terms which are ‘incompletely latinized’. This twofold historical model—‘la théorie des emprunts successifs’ (Collart 1954: 218)—seems to imply that for Varro, there is no actual genealogical connection between Latin and Greek. The most ancient connection between both languages consists in the intensive exchange taking place between the primitive Latin language of the indigenous Italians and the Aeolic dialect of the Greek newcomers (Collart 1954: 215). Nevertheless, Collart (1954: 226) suggests very carefully, on the basis of a limited number of passages, that Varro may have sensed that some Latin words had a common (genealogical) origin with some Greek words. Collart (1954: 219) emphasizes that Varro not only establishes the convergences between Greek and Latin, but also contrasts both languages to each other.

In the Latin grammatical tradition following upon Varro, several passages or works are devoted to the convergences and the differences between Latin and Greek.³⁵ Relying heavily but indirectly on this tradition, Isidore in his *Etymologiae* frequently explains Latin words with reference to their Greek counterparts. Respectively in *Etym.* 17.6.5 and 20.9.5—passages for which André (1981: 66–67) and Guillaumin (2010: 77) do not indicate a precise source—Isidore posits the general principles that ‘many Latin terms (*multa ... Latina nomina*) commonly have a Greek etymology (*Graecam plerumque etymologiam recipiunt*)’, and that ‘certain Greek words are changed a little (*paulo inflectuntur*) in Latin because of the Latin language (*propter Romanum eloquium*)’. In order to describe the correspondences between Latin and Greek, Isidore uses terms such as *trahere*, *transferre*, *deriuare*, *translatio*, *Graeca etymologia*, *Graeca origo*, or *Graeca deriuatio*. In order to describe the altered form of the Latin word with a Greek ‘origin’, he uses terms such as *inflexus*, *nothus* (‘mongrel’), or *corruptus*, and he also relies on the standard operations of *permutatio litterarum* (cf. above, p. 292 f.). In what follows, I have categorized the Latin words for which Isidore claims a Greek origin in five thematic groups. On the basis of the notes

35 Quintilian in *Institutio oratoria* 1.6.31 refers to ‘words coming from Greek (*ex Graecis orta*), which are very numerous and are chiefly derived from Aeolic (*praecipueque Aeolica ratione*)—which our language most closely resembles (*cui est sermo noster simillimus*)’ (cf. Collart 1954: 218). Another important representative of this tradition is Macrobius’ *De differentiis et societatibus Graeci Latinique uerbi*, which dates to around 400 (KGL 5: 595–655; De Paolis 1990; cf. Süss 1932: 12–16; Ax 2005: 251). For instance, Macrobius illustrates the close affinity between Latin and Greek by the fact that both languages know the same parts of speech—except for the article, ‘which Greece alone has obtained’ (cf. Denecker & Swiggers forthc.)—and offers a detailed comparison of the respective verbal systems of both languages. Also cf. above, p. 319 (the Latin ‘duals’ *ambo* and *duo*), and p. 268 for the examples given by Charisius.

in the *ALMA* editions of the *Etymologiae*, I have indicated parallels and possible sources for the etymologies provided by Isidore.

(1) **Parts of the body:** *aures* > *audes* > αὐδή (voice) (11.1.46, cf. *De differentiis rerum* 17.55); *dentes* > ὀδόντες (11.1.52); *cutis* > κύτις (11.1.78); *nerui* > νεῦρα (11.1.83); *pedes* > πόδες (11.1.112); *cor* > καρδία (11.1.118); *pulmo* > πλεύμων (11.1.124). Gasti (2010: 33 n. 80, 75 n. 813) singles out parallels in Lactantius, *De opificio Dei* 8.8 (*aures*) and Priscian, *Ars grammatica* 2.26.18 (*pedes*).

(2) **Food:** *lac* > λευκός (11.1.77); *ouum* > ωά (12.7.80); *eruum* > ὄφοβος (17.4.11); *oliua* > ἔλαιον (17.7.62); ἀμόργη > *amurca* > *emergere* (!) (the watery part of olive oil) (17.7.69); *χρέας* > *carnes* (meats) > *caro* (flesh) / *creare* (to produce) (!) (20.2.20); *potio* > πότος (20.3.1). Guillaumin (2010: 34 n. 145) identifies Varro's *De lingua Latina* 5.26.122 as the ultimate source for Isidore's mention of *potio*. It can be added to this that Varro in *De lingua Latina* 5.22.108 singles out the connection between *olea* and ἔλαια (Collart 1954: 216).

(3) **Flora and fauna:** *herpillum* (thyme) > Gr. *serpillum* (3.3.3); *silua* > *xylua* > ξύλον (17.6.5); *buxus* > πύξος (17.7.53); *leo* > λέων (12.2.3); *lupus* > λύκος (12.2.23); *canis* > κύων (12.2.25); *draco* > δράκων (12.4.4); *ros* > δρόσος (13.10.9). André (1981: 124 n. 298; 1986: 108 n. 158) singles out a certain glossary (5.234.3) as a parallel for Isidore's note on *buxus*, and Paul the Deacon's *Excerpta ex libris Festi de significazione uerborum* 6.9 (postdating Isidore's activity) as a parallel for the note on *lupus*. It can be added to this that Varro in *De lingua Latina* 5.21.103 mentions *serpyllum* as a Greek loan (Collart 1954: 222).

(4) **Buildings and architecture:** *farum* ~ φᾶρος (15.2.37, cf. 20.10.10); *domus* > δῶμα (15.3.1); *caulae* (sheepfolds) > αὐλαί (holding-pens for animals) (15.9.6). Guillaumin & Monat (2004: 45 n. 200, 55 n. 321) single out Varro's *De lingua Latina* (5.33.160) as Isidore's (ultimate) source for *domus*, and Servius' commentary on the *Aeneid* (9.59) as his source for *caulae*.

(5) **Numerals:** *unus* ~ ἕν; *duo* ~ δύο; *tres* ~ τρία; *sex* ~ ἔξι; *septem* ~ ἑπτά; *octo* ~ ὀκτώ; *nouem* ~ ἐννέα; *decem* ~ δέκα; *milia* ~ *myriada* (3.3.1–5); *ambo* > ἄμφω (10.21). Gasparotto & Guillaumin (2009: 9 n. 21) note that this is a characteristically 'varronian' way of explaining the etymology of Latin terms by way of Greek, and observe that Isidore applies it to all Latin numerals which he discusses, with the exceptions of *quattuor*

and *quinq̄ue*. There is a closer link with Varro in Isidore's statement that 'we pronounce an s instead of the aspiration in many words that are aspirated in Greek', which follows upon the equations *sex* ~ ξ̄ξ and *septem* ~ έπτά. In this connection, it can be noted with Collart (1954: 95) that like his contemporary Philoxenus (*GRF* p. 444 fr. 6), Varro is aware of the correspondence *sex* ~ ξ̄ξ and in *De lingua Latina* 5.19.96 supplements it with the correspondence *sus* ~ ῡς.

With regard to all this, the important question is precisely how Isidore conceived of the connection between Latin and Greek. If we try to integrate his comments on this issue into his larger framework of language history, which assumes Hebrew to be the single protolanguage (Sect. 7.3, p. 247), the notion of a common genealogical origin for certain Greek and Latin words becomes considerably more plausible. This assumption could be corroborated by the fact that the semantic domains listed above can all be considered relatively basic or even primitive (constituting a kind of 'fonds indigène'), and by the fact that Isidore in a couple of cases also proposes a Latin etymology for a Greek word. However, the only two explicit general statements which Isidore makes (cf. above, p. 335) each point in the direction of borrowing, not of a genealogical connection. In addition, Isidore's own competence in Greek was very limited and even when no source for his equations can be identified, it can be assumed with a high degree of plausibility that Isidore relies on a complicated tradition which in most cases goes back to Varro. This fact has two consequences. First, it considerably weakens the possibility that Isidore himself even implicitly integrated a closer connection between Latin and Greek into his larger framework of language history. Second, it means that the 'Aeolic hypothesis', which is relatively clear-cut in Varro, is only vaguely and indirectly present in Isidore's encyclopaedia. Whereas in the case of Varro, it was still possible carefully to allow for the notion of a common genealogical origin (cf. above, p. 335), it seems necessary to conclude that Isidore exclusively conceives of the closer connection between Latin and Greek in terms of lexico-semantic borrowing, presumably due to geographic proximity. Moreover, Varro's 'théorie des emprunts successifs' does not seem to occupy a place in the thought and approach of Isidore, who lumps together the 'ancient' and 'recent' loans from Greek into Latin.

Summary

This chapter aimed to analyze early Christian Latin authors' linguistic observations on the word level, i.e. on matters of lexico-semantics and morphology. It

has been noted that this level corresponds far more neatly to an actual domain of linguistic reflection among early Christian Latin authors than was the case for the level of ‘syntax’. If one main feature is to be drawn from this chapter, it is that early Christian Latin authors—probably along with their pagan predecessors and contemporaries—foster a remarkable fascination for the isolated word, especially when it has an exotic flavour or when it allows for the reconstruction of an ontologically revealing ‘original’ form.

In the first section I have focused on the authors’ observations on linguistic change. It has become clear in Chapter 7 that the authors only rarely have an elaborate notion of linguistic change on the language level. By contrast, they are very aware that individual words change over time, and they have at their disposal a reasonably refined conceptual and terminological apparatus by which to come to grips with changing words. Accordingly, it seems safe to state that the authors do not lack a notion of linguistic change, but that this notion is really situated on the lexico-semantic and morphological level of linguistic description. The isolated remarks made by Tertullian, Lactantius, Ambrose, Ambrosiaster, Jerome, Augustine, and Cassiodorus obliquely reflect ancient approaches to etymology and *permutationes litterarum* (Varro, Quintilian, Donatus), and show that etymology is primarily deployed by the authors to make a rhetorical (exegetical) point. Isidore stands out by providing (or synthesizing) an elaborate apparatus of *permutationes litterarum* and *litterae cognatae*, which obviously relates to the etymological methodology underlying his main work.

In the second section I have turned to the authors’ remarkable fascination for ‘exotic’ words. As to the sources for the authors’ comments on this level of language description, it seems possible to distinguish two main lines of influence. On the one hand, there is the Latin tradition of grammars and literary commentaries (Varro, Donatus, Servius); on the other, there is the input of lexico-semantic and morphological information relating to ‘Semitic’ languages, almost exclusively by way of Jerome. When I have focused on Jerome and Isidore, this should not be taken to mean that the tendency to incorporate and to gloss exotic words is absent in other early Christian Latin authors. Rather, I have tried to show that virtually all authors quoting ‘Semitic’ or other exotic words relied upon Jerome’s exegetical works. I have tried to give a preliminary illustration of the circulation of lexicographical *curiosa* by the cases of *gazophylacium* and *sibylla*, and I have furthermore discussed (1) Ausonius’ and Venantius Fortunatus’ integrations of ‘Gaulish’ or ‘Celtic’ words, (2) Jerome’s glosses on (a) ‘Semitic’ and on (b) ‘non-Semitic’ words, and (3) Isidore’s comments on (a) ‘exotic’, (b) ‘oriental’, (c) ‘Italo-Iberian’, (d) ‘Celtic’, and (e) ‘African’ words.

The third and last section was devoted to contrastive observations on the word level. Under this heading, I have discussed a number of comments relating to (1) grammatical number and (2) grammatical gender, and I have subsequently turned to contrastive lexicographical observations made by (3) Jerome and by (4) Augustine. Lastly, I have dealt with (5) comments on foreign words in connection with problems of translation, and with (6) Isidore's apparent but largely implicit notion of a closer bond between Latin and Greek, going back to the 'Aeolic hypothesis' most importantly in Varro. One important global trait emerging from this third section is the far-reaching assumption that etymology has an 'essential' or 'ontological' value rather than a purely 'formal' or 'intralingual' one. This assumption creates interesting tensions, e.g. between the categories of grammatical gender and of biological sex. A second, related main trait to be taken from this section is the strong influence of the cultural context on the authors' contrastive observations. As was the case with their comments on linguistic change, the authors deploy their contrastive observations primarily as rhetorical strategies in order to make a theological or an exegetical point. This has important implications not only for the lexical elements which the authors select to compare across different languages, but also for the way in which they frame the differences they describe. This means that early Christian Latin authors are hardly interested in linguistic comparison for its own sake.

The Letter Level

Having dealt with early Christian Latin authors' linguistic observations on the word level in Chapter 9, I will now discuss their observations on the letter level, i.e. the level of writing and writing systems. For a variety of reasons, writing, alphabets, and the letters they consist of occupy an important place in ancient thinking generally. Overall, the degree of literacy was significantly less elevated in antiquity than it is today, and this may have given a kind of distant 'aura' to the signs which only relatively few could actually read. Accordingly, letters and alphabets were often ascribed a magical or mysterious value (cf. Dornseiff 1975 [1922]: 1, in terms of 'unheimliches Mysterium'; Marrou 1965: 230; Riché 1972: 262). Whereas an actual 'cabalistic' culture was in Desbordes' opinion (1990: 78–79) absent from the pagan Latin tradition, the mysterious value of the alphabet and its characters was significantly enhanced by the rise of Christianity (cf. Berschin 1980: 41), due e.g. to Bible passages such as Apoc. 22:13, where Christ is designated as 'the alpha and the omega', and to the usage of x (Greek *chi* or Latin ⟨x⟩) or τ as a symbol for Christ's cross. The numeral value which certain letters have in Greek and Latin provided Christian authors with myriad possibilities in developing an 'exegetical nexus' between biblical passages which otherwise have no connection to each other (cf. Fredouille 1985: 40).

Furthermore, the process of learning the letters of the alphabet was often used as an analogy to acquiring the basis of any possible skill, and the fact that a seemingly endless number of words and phrases could be generated from a limited number of letters gave a 'universalist' dimension to the alphabet (cf. Dornseiff 1975 [1922]: 1, in terms of 'Universismus'). In specific terms, this means that the letters of the alphabet could be used as a symbol for the basic or minimal elements (*elementa*) of virtually everything, and that the alphabet as a whole, with the number and sequence of the letters it consists of, was ascribed a 'comprehensive' capacity. Accordingly, the alphabet could also be used as an organizing principle for literary works, as it often is today (cf. below).

As to the Greek and Latin traditions preceding early Christian Latin authors, Desbordes (1990: 70) points out—in her *Idées romaines sur l'écriture* which is foundational for this chapter—that reflection on writing was very prominent among the Greek sophists, among the great philosophers (Plato, Aristotle and the Stoics), and among the Neoplatonist commentators of Aristotle (Plotinus and Porphyry). Desbordes furthermore states that reflection on writing plays

an important role in Greek philosophy of language, and that in Greek philosophy as a whole, the 'letter' provides a useful model in organizing or illustrating reflection on any possible topic (cf. 'Universismus'). Desbordes (1990: 26) also points out that from the Hellenistic period onwards, the ancient Greeks and Romans foster a remarkable fascination for the 'personalization of inventions' in general, and like to identify the 'first inventor' (*πρώτος εύρετής*) of the alphabet and its different characters in particular (cf. Collart 1954: 113; Fontaine 1959: 203, 755).¹

With specific regard to the Latin tradition, Desbordes (1990: 11; tr. mine) points out that Latin culture is a culture based very much on writing, as is shown by the fact that the word *litterae* 'designates both the letters of the alphabet and the highest manifestations of intellectual life'. Desbordes furthermore points out (1990: 15; tr. mine) that for the ancient Romans (and Greeks), 'grammar' is first and foremost the 'science of letters' or the 'elementary learning of reading and writing'. She rightly argues that all this is illustrated by the Latin term *ars grammatica*, going back to the Greek *τέχνη γραμματική*, which itself derives from *γράμμα*, 'letter'. According to Collart (1954: 112; tr. mine), issues of writing and orthography always enjoyed a relative prominence in the Latin grammatical tradition, and the first Latin philologists 'even seem to have had a particular predilection for these investigations into the possibilities of their writing system'. Specific points of attention are letters as formal symbols and the history of writing and of the alphabet. In particular, Collart draws attention to the fact that Varro himself wrote a (lost) treatise *De antiquitate litterarum*.² Varro's pervasive influence on the Latin tradition is (here again) an important fact to keep in mind.

This and the above elements may help to 'set the stage' for a discussion of early Christian Latin authors' linguistic observations on the letter level. In order to make sense of the authors' comments, the present chapter will try to answer the following questions: (1) What do the authors say about the nature

1 It should be emphasized with Desbordes that while these invention myths may have some historical nucleus, the authors who recount them are in fact simplifying a sequence of evolutions which were 'more complicated, more progressive, more collective' in nature (tr. mine).

2 Desbordes specifies (1990: 51–52; tr. mine) that the latter treatise 'consisted of at least two books and dealt with the history of the alphabet, explaining, among other things, the number, order and names of the letters [cf. Collart 1954: 112]. It seems to have been an important relay in the tradition on the history of the beginnings of writing in Rome; numerous pieces of information on this subject which one encounters in later authors (*auteurs tardifs*) may or even have to go back to this treatise'.

and function of writing? (2) What do they say about the origin and history of writing in general and of specific writing systems? (3) What do the authors say about the alphabet as an organizing principle for literary works? And, (4) which specific (contrastive) observations do they make on different writing systems and on the characters they consist of?

1 Nature and Function of Writing

It can be pointed out with Desbordes (1990: 77; tr. mine) that for Latin language users generally, writing is ‘distinct and at the same time inseparable from speech’, and ‘chronologically and logically secondary’ to it. In practical terms this means, according to Desbordes, that people speak before they write, but also that the invention of writing is subsequent to the emergence of speech. As Desbordes furthermore observes (1990: 78), the implication of the ‘posteriority’ of writing is that its essential purpose is to represent speech. In other words, the function of writing can be described as ‘representative’ of speech and, secondarily, as ‘mnemonic’, since it helps to fix and thus to remember spoken, transient words. A related conception among Latin authors which she indicates is that writing, in the specific form of the Latin alphabet, is a ‘notation of sounds’ and that in principle, there is a one-to-one correspondence between a well-defined number of sounds and the limited set of letters (23) of the Latin alphabet.

This is also where terminological problems with the distinction between sign and sound come in. In this connection, Desbordes (1990: 113) argues that the ancient notion of ‘letter’ is a complicated one and that the basic conception of a letter as the minimal part of language or speech gives rise to a whole range of possible usages and distinctions. As a consequence, the term *littera* could be used to denote what we would call a ‘phoneme’, the shape of a letter, or a ‘grapheme’, among other things (cf. Abercrombie 1949; Law 2003: 61).³ Desbordes explains (1990: 113–114) that ancient commentators on the issue did try to disentangle this confusion (1) by means of the distinction between the different aspects of a letter—its name (*nomen*), shape (*figura*) and meaning (*potestas*) (cf. below on Isidore)—which derived from primary education, and (2) by means of the distinction between *littera* and *elementum* for written and spoken letters respectively, which was engrafted on the Greek distinction

³ The term *littera* was also used by early Christian Latin authors to indicate the literal level of biblical interpretation, cf. Bureau (1999).

between γράμμα and στοιχεῖον. However, Collart (1954: 77) points out that for an authority as prominent as Varro, the word *littera* designates both the graphical sign and the sound.

The notion that the letter is the minimal part (*pars minima*) of spoken language and possibly even the constituent of (the) voice is traditional in Latin grammar (Desbordes 1990: 131).⁴ Desbordes (1990: 126–128, cf. 1986) points out that *elementum*, like στοιχεῖον, could be used to designate both the letters of the alphabet and physical atoms. Although according to Desbordes it remains unclear which usage was the original one, this homonymy obviously favoured an ‘atomic’ view on the letters of the alphabet. It can furthermore be noted with Desbordes (1990: 274) that the association or comparison between letters and atoms (*elementa*) is standard in the grammatical tradition (cf. above, p. 340 f., and Desbordes 1986). She furthermore points out that ancient atom physics had made use of the comparison with the letters of the alphabet since Democritus and Leucippus, and that this comparison is used five times by Lucretius (1.196, 1.820, 1.907, 2.688, 2.1013). This ‘atomic’ approach to the letters of the alphabet, nurtured both by the grammatical and the philosophical tradition, will appear to be recurrent among early Christian Latin authors.

Representative'

With the belief that writing ‘represents’ speech, the notions of the ‘distance’ and ‘durability’ of writing are inextricably tied in. When elaborating in *Diuinae institutiones* 4.8.11 on the transitory character of speech (Sect. 1.4, p. 52), Lactantius writes that ‘what we say may well be carried off on the breeze and disappear, but when put in writing it survives to a considerable extent (*plerumque permanent litteris comprehensae*)’. As a part of his attack on pagan philosophy, he argues at 3.25.9 that there are many preconditions to ‘do’ philosophy and that as a consequence, pagan philosophy is reserved only for an elite and as such cannot amount to ‘true wisdom’. More specifically, Lactantius argues that one of the preconditions for ‘doing’ philosophy consists in that the ‘common letters’ (*communes litterae*) have to be learned

because of their usefulness for reading (*propter usum legendi*), since in such a great variety of topics (*in tanta rerum uarietate*) it is impossible

⁴ However, it should be pointed out that while Varro in his *De lingua Latina* also dwells on the validity of the ‘atomic principle’ both in natural philosophy and in the study of language (6.5.39), he identifies not the letter, but the word as the ‘minimal part’ of (significant) speech: *Verbum dico orationis uocalis partem quae sit indiuisa et minima* (10.4.77) (Taylor 1974: 9)—this concords with Stoic dialectic and philosophy of language (Collart 1954: 57).

for all details to be learned by listening (*nec disci audiendo*) nor to be contained in memory (*memoria contineri*).

To Lactantius' mind, the function of letters in writing and reading is thus mnemonic in nature. Moreover, letters substitute for oral language and for memorized speech. In doing so, they make up for the transitory character of speech and, secondarily, for the limitations of human learning and memory. This passage was integrated and expanded on by Isidore of Seville in his *Etimologiae*.⁵

A highly relevant passage for the representative function of writing can be identified in Augustine's *De ordine* 2.12.35, where it follows upon the author's 'early' account of the origins of language and civilization. As was pointed out in Section 1.1 (p. 34), this passage bears close resemblance to Cicero's expositions in *De republica* 3.2.3, and the views expressed in it might ultimately go back to Varro (Collart 1954: 52; Fontaine 1959: 49; Desbordes 1990: 77). It is important to note that Cicero in *De republica* 3.2.3, too, continued his account of the origins of language and civilization with a brief description of the origins of writing, which reads as follows:

By the same reason (*a simili etiam mente*) were also marked and represented (*sunt ... signati et expressi*) all the sounds of the voice, which seemed innumerable (*uocis, qui uidebantur infiniti, soni ... omnes*), by means of the invention of a few characters (*paucis notis inuentis*), so that conversation could be carried on with persons at a distance (*quibus et colloquia cum absentibus ... tenerentur*), and indications of our desires and records of past events could be set down.

Much in the same line as Cicero, Augustine argues in *De ordine* 2.12.35 that once people had developed language as a sophisticated means of communication, there still remained a problem in that 'the words of people who were absent could not be heard' (*audiri absentium uerba non poterant*),⁶ and that this is the consideration that gave rise to the usage of letters (*illa ratio peperit litteras*).

5 Isidore argues in *Etim.* 1.3.2 that the use of letters was invented 'for the sake of remembering things (*propter memoriam rerum*), which are bound by letters lest they slip away into oblivion (*nam ne obliuione fugiant, litteris alligantur*). With so great a variety of information (*in tanta enim rerum uarietate*), not everything could be learned by hearing (*nec disci audiendo poterant omnia*), nor retained in the memory (*nec memoria contineri*)'.

6 Cf. *De trinitate* 15.10.19, where Augustine states that thanks to the invention of letters, we are 'able to speak even with people who are absent (*cum absentibus colloqui*)'.

He argues in other words that letters were invented for the purpose of ‘writing down and distinguishing all the sounds of mouth and tongue’ (*notatis omnibus oris ac linguae sonis atque discretis*). The Aristotelian notion that the human voice is typically articulated and thus writeable—which is indicated by this quotation—will be discussed below. However, the central argument of this passage is that writing represents speech, and is thus secondary to it (cf. Desbordes 1990: 77–78).

In other works of Augustine’s, this basic understanding of the function of writing is combined to an Aristotelian semiotic perspective which presumably came to Augustine through Stoic philosophy of language. In *De doctrina Christiana* 2.26.40 Augustine argues that unlike those ‘institutions’ which people have in common with demons, those things which they have in common with other people should be ‘accepted’ or ‘adopted’, ‘insofar as [these are] not immoderate (*luxuriosa*) and superfluous (*superflua*)’ (Sect. 4.5, p. 147). Among the institutions that should be adopted, Augustine draws specific attention to the letters of the alphabet (*litterarum figurae*), ‘without which we cannot read’ (cf. Green 1995: xvi). Like Lactantius, Augustine establishes at 2.4.5 that because of the transitory character of speech (Sect. 1.4, p. 52), letters were invented as signs of [spoken] words’ (*instituta sunt per litteras signa uerborum*) (cf. Jackson 1969: 27). Furthermore, he rightly argues at 3.29.40 that the discipline of *grammatica* was named exactly from letters, γράμματα in Greek (cf. above, p. 341), and that letters are ‘signs of the sounds pertaining to the articulated voice by which we speak’ (*signa ... sonorum ad articulatam uocem, qua loquimur, pertinentium*). He specifies that letters are ‘signs of words (*signa ... uocum*)’, while words themselves are in our speech signs of those things which we conceive’ (cf. Jackson 1969: 27; Amsler 1989: 106). As Fontaine (1959: 48) points out, Augustine’s twofold definition in this passage is a rendering of Aristotle’s *De interpretatione* 1.16a: ”Εστι μὲν οὖν τὰ ἐν τῇ φωνῇ τῶν ἐν τῇ ψυχῇ παθημάτων σύμβολα, καὶ τὰ γραφόμενα τῶν ἐν τῇ φωνῇ.”⁷

Augustine’s most technical, semiotic account of the nature and function of writing can be found in his *De dialectica* (cf. Desbordes 1990: 132), another early

⁷ Combining material from Augustine’s *De ordine* and *De doctrina Christiana* (Fontaine 1959: 48–49), Isidore in *Etym.* 1.3.1 discusses the ‘representative’ capacity of writing. He defines letters as ‘tokens of things’ (*indices rerum*)—there is a direct connection between letters and reality here—and as ‘signs of words’ (*signa uerborum*), and states that ‘they have so much force (*quibus tanta uis est*) that the utterances of those who are absent (*dicta absentium*) speak to us without a voice (*nobis ... sine uoce loquantur*)’. Fontaine (1959: 49) points out that the latter notion may ultimately go back, by way of Augustine’s *De ordine*, to a lost exposition by Varro.

work of his which dates to 387 and as such by far predates *De doctrina Christiana*. Desbordes (1990: 101) points out that from Aristotle onwards (*Categoriae* 4b) it is commonly recognized that the human voice is ‘articulated’ and that exactly for this reason, it can also be written down and distinguished into letters, its minimal units (cf. below). This is precisely the notion expressed by Augustine in § 5, where he defines ‘speaking’ (*loqui*) as ‘giving a sign with an articulated word’ (*articulata uoce signum dare*), and where he subsequently specifies that by ‘articulated word’, he means ‘a word that can be grasped in letters (*quae comprehendi litteris potest*)’. The ‘atomic’ view on the letters of the alphabet (cf. below) is implied in this definition.⁸ Augustine furthermore argues that the letters which we see written down constitute ‘not a word but the sign of a word’ (*non uerbum sed uerbi signum*), and that ‘when letters are seen by the reader it comes to mind (*occurrit animo*) what is to burst forth from the voice (*quid uoce prorumpat*)’. Putting it in a different way, Augustine states that to the eyes, written words only show themselves, while to the mind, they show words—the mental representations of spoken words—apart from themselves (*praeter se uoces animo ostendunt*). Albeit from a different perspective, Augustine here as in *De ordine* indicates that writing represents speech and is as such secondary or ancillary to it.

‘Atomic’ and ‘Generative’

The ‘atomic’ and ‘generative’ nature of the letters of the alphabet is thematized by Jerome in *Ep. 121.10.24* (cf. Barr 1966: 288; Marti 1974: 165). Jerome writes that people who learn to read combine letters (*elementa* or *litterae*) to syllables and subsequently to words (*syllaba ac uerba coniungimus*) and that ‘through prolonged exercise’ they ‘proceed to the composition of an utterance (*ad texendum orationem*)’. The latter phrase has been discussed with regard to syntactic reflection in terms of ‘joining words to form sentences’ (Sect. 8.1, p. 262). Jerome subsequently moves on to connect—in a more or less allegorical interpretation of writing—the ‘generative’ nature of the alphabet to the moral basics

8 Due to its ‘governing text’, this notion is very prominent in Boethius’ commentary on Aristotle’s *De interpretatione*, where it is established in book 1 (Meiser 1880: 5) that an ‘utterance’ (*locutio*) is ‘articulated voice’ (*articulata uox*) and that the parts of such an utterance are letters (*cuius locutionis partes sunt litterae*). Boethius furthermore expounds that when these letters are connected to each other, they ‘form one united and compound voice (*unam ... uocem coniunctam compositamque*)’, which is called ‘utterance’ (*locutio*). It is clear from this exposition that Boethius regards ‘letters’, both in their graphical and in their phonetic dimensions, as the atoms of an utterance and of speech in general. Here again, the notion of *locutio* as ‘articulated voice’ is connected to the ‘atomic’ view on the letters of the alphabet.

(*elementa*) taught in the alphabetical psalms, which according to his exegesis provide Christians with the necessary equipment to understand the entire Bible (Sect. 10.3, p. 372f.).

Next to the ‘semiotic’ approach of the letters of the alphabet, Augustine in *De dialectica* 5 (Jackson 1975: 7) also takes an ‘atomic’ point of view when pointing out that a letter is strictly speaking ‘the minimal part of an articulated word’ (*pars minima uocis articulatae*)—in explicit contrast to the minimal part of a written word. As Fontaine (1959: 48 n. 2) points out, this is the definition of *littera* which is given by Donatus, but which stretches back into the grammatical tradition much further. It is also the definition that will be integrated by Cassiodorus (*Inst. 2.1.2* [Mynors 1937: 95]),⁹ as well as by Isidore (*Etym. 13.2.4*) (cf. below). However, Augustine moves on to explain that speakers of Latin also use this word by extension, in order to designate a letter when it is written down, although it is entirely silent and it does not appear as some part of a spoken word but as a sign of a part of a word (*signum partis uocis*). It is clear from this passage in *De dialectica* that Augustine conceives of a letter as an atom of (written) language.

A significantly heterogeneous comment can be found in *Sermo 32*, dating to 403. In order to demonstrate that allegories in the Bible do not always have the same meaning but can signify different realities in different contexts, Augustine in § 6 compares these allegories to the letters of the alphabet, which have different functions in different connections. Augustine highlights the generative capacities of the letters of the alphabet by elaborating on the fact that the letters are limited in number, while the words which can be formed with them are countless (cf. Baltes 1996–2002: 775 on *elementum* in Augustine). Augustine argues that

letters are themselves repeated in so many thousands of words and utterances (*litterae in tot milibus uerborum atque sermonum ipsae repetuntur*), but are not increased in number (*non augentur*). The number of words is unlimited (*uerba infinita sunt*), but the number of letters is limited (*finiae sunt tamen litterae*). No one is able to count all words, but anyone is able to count all letters, whence the multitude of words originates (*unde multitudo uerborum est*). Since one letter is put in various places (*cum una*

⁹ Cassiodorus in *Institutiones 2.1.2* (Mynors 1937: 95) draws on the grammatical tradition (cf. Courcelle 1948: 326) in defining a letter as ‘the minimal part of an articulated voice’ (*pars minima uocis articulatae*) and a syllable as ‘a cluster of letters’ (*comprehensio litterarum*) or, alternatively, as ‘the utterance of one vowel’ (*unius uocalis enuntiatio*). For a study of grammar in Cassiodorus’ works generally, cf. Halporn (2002).

littera uariis in locis ponitur), its meaning depends on its place (*pro loco ualeat*), and it does not always mean the same thing.

So far, there is nothing specifically ‘Christian’ to Augustine’s exposition. According to Desbordes (1990: 99–100) it is a widespread notion in ancient thought that signs (words, letters, numbers, etc.) allow people to discover unity in diversity, and that a limited number of letters suffices to understand the countless sounds produced by the voice. Still according to Desbordes, this notion—which might go back to Pythagoreanism—occurs in Plato’s myth of Theuth (*Phaedrus* 274c–d instead of *Philebus* 17a as indicated by Desbordes), and is recurrent in Cicero’s works (cf. above, p. 344, for *De republica* 3.2.3), which—I would like to add—may have provided the direct source for Augustine’s development.

The Christian element comes in, however, when in order to provide an example Augustine refers to the fact that ⟨d⟩ is the initial letter of both *deus* and *diabolus*, but that this does not indicate a real, ‘essential’ connection between God and the devil. On the one hand, Augustine’s rhetorical elaboration on the generative capacity of letters is a good illustration of the ‘universalist’ dimension which has been discussed in the introduction to this chapter (p. 340). On the other hand, however, his argument centering on the ⟨d⟩ in *deus* and in *diabolus* can be read as a refutation of ‘la sympathie du signifiant et du signifié’ which is according to Desbordes (1990: 69, 215) a widespread notion in ancient reflection on writing. More specifically, Augustine points out how ridiculous it would be if one would be afraid to harm God when using the ⟨d⟩ of *deus* in the word *diabolus*. It is particularly interesting to connect Augustine’s argument to his critical outline of the Stoics’ analogist approach in etymology and the sound symbolism inherent to it in § 6 of his *De dialectica* (Sect. 9.1, p. 296 f.). The entire exposition in *Sermo* 32 serves Augustine’s exegetical argument that allegories in the Bible should be interpreted with due attention to their immediate context and can thus symbolize different realities.

The atomic and generative view on the letters of the alphabet is prominent in Boethius’ *De divisione* (PL 64: 888A–B), where the author expounds the principle that ‘in those things where the composition is manifold (*multiplex est compositio*), the division, too, is manifold (*multiplex etiam est diuisio*)’. Having mentioned the examples of animals, ships and houses, Boethius also refers to books, which can be dissolved into verses, words, syllables, and letters. To this he adds the observation that these are not only parts of a whole (the book), but also parts of parts (*partes partium*). This observation indicates a strongly atomic and generative view on the letters of the alphabet. Likewise, in *De institutione arithmetica* 2.1 (CCSL 94A: 93) (and cf. his commentary on Aristotle’s

Categoriae 4 [PL 64: 404]), Boethius argues that all things are primarily composed out of ‘the basic components of things’ (*rerum elementa*), and that ‘it is again into these basic components that things are resolved (*in eadem rursus ... soluuntur*) when disintegration occurs (*resolutione facta*)’. He subsequently states that letters are ‘the basic components of an articulated word’ (*articulatis uocis elementa*) and that accordingly, ‘it is from them that the joining of syllables proceeds’ (*ab eis est syllabarum progressa coniunctio*). The other way round, ‘it is to these same letters, as the ultimate components, that this conjunction is again dissolved’ (*in easdem rursus terminatur extremas*). When Boethius mentions the equivalent status of sounds in music and of the four elements in nature, this is all the more illustrative of the atomic view he holds of the letters of the alphabet.¹⁰

Interesting evidence for an ‘atomic’ view on the letters of the alphabet can also be found in the works of Isidore. As is pointed out by Fontaine (1959: 829–830), Isidore’s interest for the characters of the alphabet is in perfect agreement with his general concern with the ‘origins’ and ‘first elements’ of things. This complicated interconnection between different types of ‘first elements’ is well reflected in *Etym.* 13.2.1–4, a section entitled *De atomis* which (still according to Fontaine) contains a simplified version of Epicurean atomism. Isidore there explains that

¹⁰ Cassiodorus, too, briefly refers to the ‘generative’ nature of the letters of the alphabet in a comparison in *Expositio Psalmorum* 144.21, where he argues that all human utterances (infinite in number) are covered by the limited types of utterances included in Aristotle’s collection of commonplaces (*Topica*), in the same way as ‘all of speech is encompassed by the letters of the alphabet’ (*sicut uniuersus sermo litteris ... clauderetur*). As Adriaen points out in the *apparatus fontium* to this passage of *Expositio Psalmorum* (CCSL 98:1297), Cassiodorus here relied on Boethius’ translation of Aristotle’s *Topica*. On the same line of thought, but in the context of an *ad hoc*, rhetorical comparison, Cassiodorus had stated already in *Variae* 3.52.2 that boundary disputes are ‘carefully sorted out by geometrical figures and by the surveyor’s art, in the same way as all of speech is enclosed by the letters of the alphabet’ (*quemadmodum litteris omnis sermo conclusus est*). A different account can be found in *Variae* 8.12.4–5 (cf. below, p. 360), where Cassiodorus rhetorically argues that when Mercury, according to a current pagan tradition, shaped and arranged the letters of the alphabet, he ‘invented a road for the senses (*uiam sensualem reperit*) by which meaning can make for the heights (*per quam alta petens*), and reach at its swiftest the inner shrine of understanding (*ad penetralia prudentiae mens possit uelocissima peruenire*)’. This elaboration associates writing with the human senses and understanding, and it has the possible implication that writing in a way ‘guides’ or ‘shapes’ human understanding. However, one should be careful with drawing the implications of a development as rhetorical as this one.

what philosophers call atoms are certain corporeal particles in the world (*quasdam in mundo corporum partes*) that are so very tiny that they are not visible to the eye, and that they do not undergo τομή, that is, ‘splitting’ (*sectionem*), whence they are called ἀτομοι.

He moves on to explain that there are atoms in ‘bodies’ (matter), time, and number, and to demonstrate that so far as numbers are concerned, eight can be divided into four, four into two, and two into one, but that ‘one is an atom, because it is indivisible (*insecabilis*)’. Isidore then states that this procedure also applies to language:

Thus also with letters, for an utterance is divided into words (*nam orationem diuidis in uerba*), words into syllables (*uerba in syllabas*), a syllable into letters (*syllabam in litteras*). But a letter, the smallest part (*littera, pars minima*), is an atom (*atomus*) and cannot be divided (*nec diuidi potest*).

Fontaine (1959: 57) rightly infers from this passage that Isidore regards the letters of the alphabet as ‘first principles’ of language, and that from his etymological point of view he thus attributes a special importance to them (although they are semiotically secondary). Furthermore, Fontaine interestingly observes (cf. Holtz 1981: 260) that this importance ‘explains the place of his chapter on the alphabet, immediately after the initial definitions of the disciplines and arts, and before the general chapter on grammar and its subdivisions’ (tr. mine). However, Fontaine points out that rather surprisingly, the actual source for Isidore’s exposition appears to be Augustine’s *Sermo 32*, which has been discussed above. With reference to the average level of learning in Isidore’s days, Fontaine emphasizes the fact that while Augustine’s elementary explanation of the notion ‘atom’ was explicitly meant for ‘esprits lents’, it is the most detailed exposition which Isidore gives of atom theory.

Isidore’s Discussions of the Alphabet

Isidore’s comments on the nature and function of the alphabet and its components are noticeably influenced by their place in book 1 of the *Etymologiae*, which is conceived as a grammar within the etymological encyclopaedia (cf. e.g. Swiggers 1984, 1989 [1984]). Although ‘language manuals’ are in principle excluded from the primary corpus for this study, I will discuss Isidore’s relevant comments included in this book, since traditional grammatical notions are here closely connected to more general, ‘language-theoretical’ observations. It is for the same reason that (most of) Isidore’s observations are discussed separately. Drawing on Augustine’s *De ordine* 2.12.35 (cf. above, p. 344f.), Isidore

in *Etym.* 1.3.1 describes the ‘common letters’ (*litterae communes*)—as opposed to *litterae liberales* (cf. below, p. 367f.)—as the ‘primary elements of the art of grammar’ (*primordia grammaticae artis*). He moves on to suggest that the ‘learning of letters’ (*quarum disciplina*) can in a way be considered ‘the infancy of the art of grammar’ (*uelut quaedam grammaticae artis infantia*), and notes that for this reason, Varro called it *litteratio*.¹¹ At 1.3.3 Isidore states that *litterae* are so called as if they were *leg-iterae* (cf. Copeland & Sluiter 2009: 18–19), ‘because they provide a road for those who are reading (*iter legentibus praes-tent*)’, or because they are repeated in reading (*in legendō iterentur*). Fontaine (1959: 58) points out that while this twofold etymology is paralleled in the entire grammatical tradition, Isidore’s direct source is probably Servius’ *Commentarius in artem Donati*.¹² In these definitions, the letters of the alphabet are ascribed an ‘atomic’ or ‘generative’ character, next to a ‘guiding’ function in the reading process.

At 1.4.16 Isidore comments on the nature of the letters of the alphabet in close connection with the grammatical tradition. He begins by establishing the three aspects or ‘accidents’ of each letter of the alphabet (*unicuique autem litterae tria accidunt*). More specifically, he explains that each letter is defined (1) by its name (*nomen*)—‘how it is called’, (2) by its shape (*figura*)—‘by which character (*quo caractere*) it is designated’—and (3) by its function (*potestas*)—‘whether it is taken as vocalic or consonantal’. An optional fourth ‘accident’ which, as Isidore informs his reader, is added by some is (4) its ‘order’ or ‘sequence’ (*ordo*)—‘what does it precede and what does it follow upon, as *a* is first and *b* follows’. It has been pointed out in the introduction to this section (p. 342) that the terminology of the ‘accidents’ of a letter was one of the ways by which the ancients tried to overcome the confusion with regard to letters as sounds and letters as signs. Fontaine (1959: 69) notes that the threefold distinction *nomen*, *figura*, *potestas* was traditional since the Latin grammarian Charisius, and that Isidore relies on the *Commentum artis Donati* of Pompeius,

¹¹ The characterization of *litteratio* as *grammaticae infantia* indeed goes back ultimately to Varro, but is still part of Isidore’s ‘reworking’ of Augustine’s *De ordine* (Collart 1954: 52, 1978b: 10; Fontaine 1959: 58, 201).

¹² Servius, *Commentarius in artem Donati* (KGL 4: 421): *Quae ideo dictae sunt litterae, quod legentibus iter praebeant, uel quod in legendō iterentur, quasi legiterae*. Cf. furthermore Diomedes, *Ars grammatica* (KGL 1: 421), Marius Victorinus, *Ars grammatica* (KGL 6: 5), Pompeius, *Commentum artis Donati* (KGL 5: 98), Cledonius, *Ars grammatica* (KGL 5: 26), ‘Sergius’, *De littera de syllaba de pedibus de accentibus de distinctione commentarius* (KGL 4: 475), Priscian, *Ars grammatica* (KGL 2: 6; KGL 3: 108), ‘Sergius’/Servius, *Explanaciones in artem Donati* (KGL 4: 518).

which in turn draws on Servius. I would like to add that the obvious point of reference in the Latin grammatical tradition is Donatus' *Ars maior* 1.2: *accidunt unicuique litterae tria, nomen, figura, potestas*. Fontaine furthermore notes that the fourth accident, *ordo*, is added to Pompeius' classification by Isidore himself, on the basis of different sources.¹³

To the optional fourth 'accident' of *ordo*, Isidore connects an interesting supposed 'language universal' underpinned by a 'biological' explanation. He argues that the letter *a* 'is the first letter among all nations (*in omnibus gentibus ... prior ... litterarum*)', because it is the first to open the voice of babies being born (*ipsa prior nascentibus uocem aperiat*)'. While conceding that it is impossible to identify a source for this comment—apart from the broader sphere of Stoic anthropology—Fontaine (1959: 69 with n. 2) points out that this statement is 'favorable aux partisans de l'origine naturelle des lettres'. In dialogue with Fontaine's observations, I would like to suggest that given the Stoic tenor of this passage, Varro's *De antiquitate litterarum* would make a good case to be the ultimate (and probably indirect) source for Isidore's remark, and I would like to point out that the remark at issue is hard to reconcile (1) with Isidore's statement that the sequence of the letters of the alphabet is a matter of convention (cf. below, p. 353)—although only one letter is concerned—, and (2) with his belief that the Latin *a* derives from the Greek *alpha*, which in turn derives from the Hebrew *aleph*.

In a passage which closely connects to the issue of language origin and the νόμος / φύσις basis for naming (Ch. 1, p. 26), Isidore at 1.4.17 explores the interconnections between the sounds, shapes, and names of letters. Both the shapes and the names of letters are argued to have been partly inspired by their sounds, but also to be based on convention and thus to vary across different languages. Following Augustine's *De ordine* 2.12.35, Isidore writes that

the nations (*gentes*) assigned the names of the letters from the sounds in their own languages (*ex sono propriae linguae*), when the sounds of the mouth were noted and distinguished (*notatis oris sonis atque discretis*).

This statement indicates an intimate connection between nation and language, and suggests that Isidore situates the process he describes in a distant past,

¹³ It can be specified with Desbordes (1990: 117) that already in the Greek scholia to Dionysius Thrax 317.7, the στοιχεῖον is given the four attributes name, shape, position, and value. Accordingly, Isidore's exposition can be read as a codification of what Desbordes (1990: 118) terms 'le bricolage latin' on the basis of Greek discussions of the issue.

when people were just becoming aware of the sounds they were uttering. This is confirmed by what follows: 'After they paid attention to these sounds, they imposed both names and shapes on them (*et nomina illis et figuras impo-suerunt*)'. While the belief that the names of letters are motivated by their sounds is relatively common, Isidore appears to stand out among early Christian Latin authors by his conviction that the shapes of letters, too, are motivated in part by their sound. He writes that humans formed the shapes of the letters 'partly by whim' (*partim ex placito*) and 'partly from the sound of the letters' (*partim ex sono litterarum*). In order to demonstrate the iconicity of writing in the latter case, he provides the example of the letters ⟨i⟩ and ⟨o⟩, arguing that /i/ 'is as it were a thin sound (*exilis sonus*)' and is thus represented by 'a slender twig' or 'rod' (*tenuis uirgula*), while /o/ 'is a thick sound (*pinguis sonus*)' and thus has a 'full shape' (*plena figura*). For the 'graphophonetic symbolism' which underlies this statement (cf. Desbordes 1990: 69, 215), Fontaine (1959: 49–50) quotes as a parallel Socrates' statement in *Cratylus* 426e that the name-giver used the *iota* in words 'for everything subtle ($\tau\alpha\lambda\varepsilon\pi\tau\alpha\pi\acute{a}v\tau\alpha$)', which can most readily pass through all things'.

As Fontaine (1959: 49–50) furthermore points out, the combination of nature and convention in the naming of letters is reminiscent of the reconciliation envisaged by Plato in his *Cratylus* (Sect. 1.1, p. 42); in Fontaine's words (tr. mine), 'humans merely arranged the shapes of the letters on the basis of natural phonetic facts, which in part also defined their shapes'. Fontaine notes that Isidore does not illustrate the arbitrary naming of letters (*ex placito*, cf. above) by means of an example, but only mentions it (concisely) as an embarrassing anomaly. In Fontaine's opinion, this relates to Isidore's concern to reach the essence (nature) of 'letters' by way of their signs. This point of view is also evidenced in the statement by which Isidore closes the paragraph: 'Now nature has assigned the function (*potestatem ... natura dedit*), and [human] will has assigned the order (*uoluntas ordinem*)'. By *potestas*, Isidore presumably means the reference from character to sound, the 'phonetic value'. On this reading, he is actually saying that the names and shapes of the letters are motivated by nature, since reference is actually this same relation in the inverse direction. It is somewhat surprising to read that the 'sequence' or 'order' (*ordo*) of the letters is regarded as something arbitrary (*uoluntas*), since this is hard to reconcile with the strong 'universalist' dimension so often attributed to the letters of the alphabet and their sequence.

2 Origin and History of Writing and Writing Systems

It has been pointed out in the introduction to this chapter (p. 341) that ancient authors fostered a remarkable fascination for the origin and the ‘first inventor’ (*πρῶτος εὑρετής*) of all kinds of things (cf. Kleingünther 1933, Thraede 1962a, 1962b), and of writing and writing systems in particular. Desbordes (1990: 26) notes more specifically that it is primarily in late Latin texts (she mentions Isidore as an ending point) that modifications to the Latin alphabet are attributed to specific individuals from the pre-classical period, often in a historically inaccurate or simplified way. In order to establish the general coordinates for early Christian Latin authors’ discussions of the origin and history of writing and writing systems, it seems useful to quote two pagan accounts of this subject. The account given in the 1st century AD by Pliny the Elder in his *Naturalis historia* 7.56.192 (cf. Desbordes 1990: 138–139) reads as follows:

I am of opinion that the Assyrians have always had writing, but others, e.g. Gellius, hold that it was invented in Egypt by Mercury, while others think it was discovered in Syria; both schools of thought believe that Cadmus imported an alphabet of 16 letters into Greece from Phoenicia and that to these Palamedes at the time of the Trojan war added the four characters ΖΥΦΧ, and after him Simonides the lyric poet added another four, ΨΞΩΘ, all representing sounds recognized also in the Latin alphabet (*quarum omnium uis in nostris recognoscitur*). Aristotle holds that the primitive alphabet contained 18 letters, and that x and z were added by Epicharmus more probably than by Palamedes.

A second relevant account is given in the 4th century AD by Marius Victorinus in his *Ars grammatica* (KGL 6: 23) (cf. Desbordes 1990: 135), which dates to before the author’s conversion to Christianity. This account omits the earliest stages but focuses more extensively on the history of the Latin alphabet:

The inventors of letters (*repertores litterarum*): Cadmus brought (*trans-tulerunt*) from Phoenicia to Greece, and Evander to us, the letters a b c d e i k l m n o p r s t v, which are 16 in number. Afterwards some were added (*adiectas*) by Palamedes and others by Simonides, up until the number of 24, as is reported by the grammarians (*grammatici ... tradiderunt*) and apart from them by Demetrius of Phalerum, Hermocrates, and among our authors (*ex nostris*), Cincius, Fabius and Gellius. Among them Cincius says that ‘a small number of the letters was changed (*paucis commutatis*) in order to become accepted in our language (*ut ad linguam nostram*

peruenirent). So Cadmus brought them (*transtulerunt*) from Phoenicia to Greece, and Evander from there to us.

The crucial elements which can be gathered from these accounts are the following. Writing was invented either in Assyria, or in Syria, or by the god Mercury (Hermes) in Egypt (the latter alternative was relatively widespread according to Desbordes 1990: 140–141).¹⁴ Regardless of where it came from originally, it was brought from Phoenicia to Greece by the Phoenician prince and founder of Thebes named Cadmus. In Greece, it was enlarged by the mythological figure Palamedes (or by the philosopher-dramatist Epicharmus) and by the lyric poet Simonides. In last instance, it was brought from Greece to Italy by the Arcadian hero Evander. It is commonly held that the Greek letters which were brought to Italy by Evander and as such provided the basis for the Latin alphabet were 16 in number. With regard to the initial stage, it should be pointed out that Varro in a passage from his *De antiquitate litterarum* preserved by Priscian (*Ars grammatica* 1; GRF p. 183 fr. 1) attributes the invention of writing and the design of the respective characters to the ‘Chaldeans’ (Collart 1954: 112–113). Whereas these ‘Chaldeans’ are possibly to be identified as ‘Assyrians’ or as ‘Phoenicians’ (cf. earlier in this paragraph), it is also possible that Varro uses *Chaldaeis* in a general sense, to denote ‘oriental sages and magicians’ (Collart 1954: 114; tr. mine), or possibly ‘Semites’ in general.

In this connection, it should also be noted with Holladay (1983: 138 n. 6) that the Phoenician invention of the alphabet ‘was a well-established, though not unchallenged, tradition in antiquity’. As witnesses to this tradition, Holladay mentions—apart from Pliny (cf. above, p. 354)—Herodotus (*Historiae* 5.58), Athenaeus (*Deipnosophistae* 1.28c), and Diodorus Siculus (3.67.1, 5.74.1). It is interesting to note that this tradition concerning the Phoenician origin of the alphabet was also ‘appropriated’ by and ‘subjigated’ to a Jewish view on the origin of the alphabet, namely by Eupolemos, a Hellenistic-Jewish historian from the 2nd century BC (Holladay 1983: 93; cf. Gallagher 2012: 134). In a passage of his *Concerning the Kings in Judaea* (Holladay’s translation) which has been preserved only in Clement of Alexandria’s *Stromata* 1.23.153.4 and in Eusebius of Caesarea’s *Praeparatio euangelica* 9.26.1, Eupolemos argues that Moses was the one who invented the alphabet and gave it to the Jews, and that the Phoenicians borrowed it from the Jews and subsequently passed it on to the Greeks. This tradition—which singles out Moses as the first ‘sage’ and posits the anteriority

¹⁴ Mercury’s role as the inventor of letters is refuted by Tertullian in *De corona* 8.2 and by Arnobius the Elder in *Aduersus nationes* 4.14.

of Jewish and Judaeo-Christian over pagan writing and civilization—provides the background for Augustine's discussions of the history of the alphabet (cf. below).

With regard to the historical reality of the Latin alphabet which corresponds to the final stage of the above accounts, it can be established with Desbordes (1990: 173) that in its classical form, the Latin alphabet consisted of 21 letters, {a b c d e f g h i k l m n o p q r s t v x}, to which were added two Greek letters, {y} and {z}, which were reserved in principle for the notation of Greek words. However, the sum of 23 was regarded only as an ending point in a process of development and accumulation, consisting of various consecutive layers. As Collart (1954: 114–115) points out, Varro states in his *De antiquitate litterarum* (GRF p. 184 fr. 2) that the Latin alphabet in its initial form (the 'apport primitif') consisted of 16 letters—taught by Cadmus in Greece and brought to Italy by Evander—while the 7 other letters were added later on by other more or less legendary figures. Collart explains that the number of 16 initial letters was the most authoritative view, for which Varro could rely on Cincius Alimentus' *Historiae* and on Cnaeus Gellius' *Annales*,¹⁵ which are referred to in Marius Victorinus' account (cf. above, pp. 354–355). With Collart (1954: 114–115) it can furthermore be pointed out that whereas the number of 16 original letters is maintained by Tacitus (*Annales* 11.14), Caesar in a section of his *De analogia* (GRF p. 148 fr. 4) proposes the singular view that the Latin alphabet initially consisted of 11 letters. It is also important to note, however, that according to some later sources, Varro held that the Latin alphabet consists of 17 'sufficient' letters plus 6 'superfluous' ones—next to, or instead of the ratio 16+7.

It should be observed with Desbordes (1990: 145) that the body of ideas underlying the introduction of Greek letters into Italy corresponds to the 'Aeolic hypothesis' (Sect. 7.3, p. 244f., and 9.3, p. 334f.). More specifically, Desbordes explains that according to the statements by Cato the Elder and Varro, the Greek heroes who introduced the alphabet also introduced their language in Italy. Still according to Desbordes, these heroes' language was the Aeolic dialect of Greek and the alphabet they introduced was of the Aeolic, not of the Ionic-Attic type, and this is why according to Pliny the Elder (*Naturalis historia* 7.57–58.210) the shape of the Latin letters differs from that of the letters of classical Greek. Whereas Desbordes (1990: 136) confirms that this Greek origin lent prestige to the Latin alphabet and to Roman history more generally, she also points out (1990: 146) that in spite of this undebated affinity, everyone was

¹⁵ According to Desbordes (1990: 135), these historiographical works date to the late 3rd century BC and are as such the first Latin texts on the history of the Latin alphabet.

evidently aware that the Greek and Latin alphabets were not identical after all. She argues that a ‘claim of a Latin specificity’ (tr. mine) manifested itself in the myth of the nymph Carmentis or Carmenta, the mother of Evander, who is said to have invented the Latin letters specifically (Servius, *Commentarius in artem Donati; KGL* 4: 421) or to have transformed the Greek letters into Latin ones (a certain Hyginus in *Fabulae* 277) (also cf. Pugliarello 2003). Desbordes interprets this myth—rightly, in my opinion—as an attempt to demonstrate that the Latin alphabet is in the end a different entity from the Greek alphabet. On a similar line of thought, Collart (1954: 115) argues that when Varro deals with the addition of 7 letters to the 16 original letters, he conceives of this as a ‘nationalization’ of the alphabet.

For a final point of interest, attention can be drawn, with Collart (1954: 246) and Desbordes (1990: 143), to the figure of Evander’s mother Carmentis (also Carmenta, Casmena, or Camena), who has an Etruscan name meaning ‘the Muse’. Although Carmentis was one of the ‘Camenae’ but did not belong to the nine Muses, the Etruscan etymology for her name indicates a broader association between the Muses on the one hand and writing as a manifestation of culture on the other. A clear instance of this association can be identified in Diodorus Siculus 5.74.1, where it is stated that ‘to the Muses ... it was given by their father Zeus to discover the letters ($\tauὴν τῶν γραμμάτων εὑρεσιν$) and to combine words in the way which is designated poetry’. In Christian Latin literature, this association comes in cursorily when Pacian in *Ep. 2.4.5–6*—while defending himself for having quoted a verse from Vergil (Costanza 1978)—ironically ascribes to his Christian addressee the pagan belief that the letters were invented by the Muses. He first quotes his addressee’s threat, ‘I will smear your letters all over with a long-lasting oil of cedar to protect them from the decay-causing enemies of the Muses’, and subsequently asks his addressee exactly which Muses he means: ‘perhaps those who invented letters’ (*an quae inuenierint litteras*)? Further elaborating on this, he asks: ‘Tell me, ... did the Muses invent letters (*musae litteras reppererunt*)? Do not all things come through the Lord (*nonne per Dominum omnia*) and are not all things from God (*et a Deo omnia*)?’ Pacian’s rhetorical question implies that in his opinion, the letters of the alphabet are due to God, not to humans or to the ‘Muses’.

Jerome and Augustine on the History of the Hebrew Alphabet

Jerome takes a ‘fact-based’ approach to the history of the Hebrew alphabet when arguing in the preface to his translation of Kings (cf. below, p. 373) that the Hebrew and the Samaritan alphabets were originally the same (‘Samaritans’ being the members of a specific ‘sect’ of Judaism; cf. Pummer 2002, 2016; Millar

2010: 74), but that ‘after the capture of Jerusalem and the restoration of the temple’, the historical Jewish figure Esdras or Ezra (5th century BC), ‘scribe and teacher of the Law’, invented new, ‘Hebrew’ letters (*alias litteras repperisse*). Jerome furthermore notes that these new, ‘Hebrew’ letters are used for noting the Hebrew language of his days, while the Samaritans continue to use the old script (cf. *Commentarii in Ezechielem* 3.9.4/6). With regard to this ‘invention’ of Hebrew letters, Gallagher (2012: 130) explains that whereas the Rabbis rightly believed that Ezra had introduced the new (square) script from Aramaic into Hebrew, Jerome (like Origen) apparently thought that Ezra invented an entirely new ‘Hebrew’ alphabet for the notation of Hebrew, which was subsequently borrowed by Aramaic-speaking Jews. As Gallagher indicates, this confusion explains Jerome’s statements in *Commentarii in Danielem* 1.2.4a and in *Dialogi contra Pelagianos* 3.2 that the passages concerned are written in the Aramaic language (*lingua Chaldaica / Syriaca*), but in Hebrew characters (*Hebraicis litteris*).

In comparison to Jerome, Augustine takes a more speculative approach to the history of the Hebrew alphabet. One of his main concerns is the question whether Moses introduced writing (i.e. the Hebrew alphabet) among the Hebrews or not. Augustine for the first time deals with the issue in his *Quaestiones in Heptateuchum*, which consist of preparatory notes for his *De ciuitate Dei* and which were composed from 419 onwards (O’Daly 1986–1994: 974; cf. Rüting 1916 and Sect. 2.2, p. 80). At 2.69 of the *Quaestiones* Augustine discusses the matter in connection with the Greek noun γραμματοεισαγωγοί, which occurs in the Septuagint text of Ex. 18:21. He notes that according to one of the possible Greek etymologies of this term, it can refer to teachers whose task it is to ‘introduce’ others ‘in letters’. On the basis of this explanation, Augustine spells out the possible inference—made by ‘some’—‘that the Hebrews would have had letters’ (*quod habuerint Hebrei litteras*) already before Moses gave the Law, viz. since people could be introduced in them. However, Augustine immediately integrates the following disclaimer: ‘I do not know whether it is any good to investigate when these [letters] started to exist (*quae quando coepерint esse*)’. He subsequently mentions the opinion of some (*non nullis ... uidetur*) that these letters started to exist with the first people (*a primis hominibus*)—Adam and his immediate descendants—and from there on persisted, via Noah and the ancestors of Abraham, to the people of Israel. However, Augustine then states that he sees no ground on which this should be believed. He thus leaves the question undecided, but seems inclined to believe that the Hebrew letters came into existence only when Moses gave the Law.

Augustine clearly made up his mind by the time when he wrote book 18 of his *De ciuitate Dei*, possibly in 424/425 (O’Daly 1986–1994: 974). As Eskhult

(2014: 334) points out, Augustine's discussion of the topic is an integral part of his exposition of the theory of *translatio sapientiae*, according to which the Hebrews were the first possessors of knowledge and wisdom, and only subsequently transferred it to the Greeks and Egyptians. While demonstrating the anteriority and, accordingly, the superiority of Judaeo-Christian over pagan civilization, he there straightforwardly argues that both the Hebrew language and its alphabet date back to what I have termed the 'primeval situation' in language history (Ch. 2, p. 57f.), i.e. to Adam and his immediate descendants, and not just to Moses. In *De ciuitate Dei* 18.37 Augustine first argues on a general level that Moses was really the first 'wise man' in world history. Although there must have been some degree of learning in Egypt in Moses' days—since Act. 7:22 has it that 'Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians'—Augustine points out that Egyptian learning cannot have preceded the prophets of Jews and Christians. In order to demonstrate this, he points out that even Abraham was already a prophet and, as such, a 'wise man', and that the alphabet was taught to the Egyptians by Isis, whose father Inachus began to govern the Argives only during the lifetime of Abraham's grandsons. Accordingly, Isis cannot have preceded Abraham. The alleged recent date of the Egyptian writing system is thus used by Augustine in the debate over the anteriority of Judaeo-Christian and pagan culture and civilization.

Augustine tackles the problem raised in *Quaestiones in Heptateuchum* 2.69 more specifically in *De ciuitate Dei* 18.39. He there argues that it should not be believed—as some do (*quod nonnulli arbitrantur*)—that it is only as a spoken language that Hebrew was preserved by Heber and passed on to Abraham—a notion which had in itself already been established in book 16 of *De ciuitate Dei* (Sect. 2.2, p. 77f.). According to the point of view which Augustine here denies, Hebrew as a written language began to exist only with the Law given by Moses. Whereas Augustine in his *Quaestiones in Heptateuchum* seems cautiously inclined to subscribe to this point of view, he clearly refutes it in this passage of *De ciuitate Dei*. More precisely, he argues that to the contrary, written Hebrew and its literature were 'nurtured by that succession of fathers (*per illam successionem patrum*)', i.e. the line of succession stretching from Adam, over Noah, Heber and Abraham, to Moses. Augustine admits that Moses appointed men among the people—the γραμματοεισαγωγοί of Ex. 18:21—who had to teach the Hebrew letters to others, before the latter came to know anything of the Law in its written form (*priusquam diuinæ legis ulla litteras nossent*). When Augustine explains γραμματοεισαγωγοί etymologically as people who 'introduce letters into the minds of their pupils, or rather, introduce those whom they teach to letters', it is probably implied that the γραμματοεισαγωγοί should not be thought to have 'introduced' the Hebrew letters as a new reality, on

Moses' command—which would correspond to an alternative etymological explanation. On the basis of all this, Augustine concludes that there is no reason at all for the Egyptians to take pride in their alleged cultural anteriority and superiority, repeating that they were taught letters only by Isis (cf. above, p. 359).

The relation between the doubt expressed in *Quaestiones in Heptateuchum* and the decision made in *De ciuitate Dei* is comparable to Augustine's intellectual evolution with regard to the Abraham or Heber eponymy of 'Hebrew' (Sect. 2.2, p. 79f.). If the position taken by Augustine in *De ciuitate Dei* detracts something from Moses' prestige as the first 'sage' in world history, it has the advantage of giving to Hebrew in its spoken and written form the greatest possible antiquity, as it stretches back to the first man. The continuous line of succession of the Hebrew letters and literature (Adam—Noah—Heber—Abraham—Moses) is an integral part of Augustine's Heber-centered model of language history, which emphasizes the continuous historical development of the 'heavenly city' in world history (Sect. 2.2, p. 77f.).

Cassiodorus on the Origin of the Greek Alphabet

In the period preceding his monastic conversion, Cassiodorus in *Variae* 8.12.4–5 reports the allegedly widespread belief (*frequentior ... traditio*) that Mercury was the one who assembled (*collegisse*) the letters of the alphabet—or who conceived them as units—and that he modelled them 'on the flight of the birds of the river Strymon', adding that 'even today, the cranes which gather in flocks are taught by nature to represent the shapes of the alphabet (*alphabeti formas ... describunt*)'. Cassiodorus explains that Mercury arranged these shapes in a suitable order (*quem in ordinem decorum redigens*), and this 'with an appropriate mixture of vowels and consonants' (*uocalibus consonantibusque congruenter ammixtis*). It is remarkable in my opinion (1) that this quotation combines a mythical perspective to the technical notions of *ordo*, vowels, and consonants, and (2) that it shows Mercury shaping the letters of the alphabet in an arbitrary way, but on the basis of an existing natural pattern.

The notion that Mercury shaped the letters of the alphabet after the flight of cranes—which Cassiodorus concisely repeats in *Expositio Psalmorum* 118.176 (*sic grues litteris Graecis uolatus suos depingunt*; CCSL 98A: 1138)—also occurs in a Latin collection of myths (*Fabulae* 277), probably an approximative translation of a Greek work which was procured by a further unknown Hyginus, possibly in the Antonine age (Desbordes 1990: 142). Due to the complicated nature of the 'heurematic' tradition, this work may have been Cassiodorus' direct or indirect source. This possibility is perhaps confirmed by the fact that Cassiodorus attributes his information to a further unknown Greek grammar-

ian whom he designates Helenus, and whom he also mentions in *Inst.* 2.1.1 (Holtz 1981: 245; Barnish 1992: 104 n. 6). In this connection, Courcelle (2¹⁹⁴⁸: 327) suggests—following Knaack—that Cassiodorus' entire digression is based on Hyginus, who probably referred to Hellanicos, an author of the 5th century BC who composed a collection of εύρήματα. Cassiodorus' 'Helenus' would then be a corrupted form of Hyginus' 'Hellanicos'. Fontaine (1959: 755 n. 2; tr. mine) singles out this passage in Cassiodorus' *Variae* as a late representative of the 'heurematic' tendency—the 'quest' for the 'first inventor'—in ancient literature, which indicates the persistence of a 'heurematic documentation' in the early 6th century and a contemporary flavour for a display of this kind of erudition. It has indeed been noted by Riché (3¹⁹⁷²: 81) that this 'heurematic' fascination is an important characteristic of Cassiodorus' scholarly curiosity (*eruditio*).

During the time following upon his monastic conversion, Cassiodorus in *Institutiones* 2.1.1 probably draws on Augustine when stating that the discipline of *grammatica* was named exactly from the letters of the alphabet (Cassiodorus does not explicitly mention the Greek etymology γράμματα). He furthermore deals with the historical development of the Greek alphabet when reporting the tradition that Cadmus was the very first (*primus omnium*) to discover (*inuenisse*) letters, 16 in number. Cadmus is reported to have passed these on (*tradens*) to the Greeks, who then supplied the other letters of the alphabet (*reliquas ... suppleuerunt*). This point of view is incompatible with the role Cassiodorus gives to Mercury in his pre-conversion *Variae*, and it is remarkable at the same time that Cassiodorus in his *Institutiones* does not follow Augustine in giving a prominent place to Moses in the history of writing and writing systems.

Venantius Fortunatus and Gregory of Tours on 'Exotic' Writing Systems and on Runes in Particular

Venantius Fortunatus playfully refers to a variety of 'exotic' writing systems in *Carmen* 7.18, a letter in elegiac verse addressed to a certain Flavus. Fortunatus complains that he is sending letters to Flavus again and again, without receiving any in return. If this silence is due to an insufficient supply of paper, Fortunatus jestingly suggests, Flavus might as well write on the bark of a beech, as long as he writes. If Flavus remains silent out of a disgust for the Latin language, Fortunatus furthermore writes, he may as well write him a letter in Hebrew characters (*Hebraicis ... notis*), or in Persian characters (*Achemeniis ... signis*), in Greek characters (*Argolico ... sopho*), or even in 'barbarian' runes inscribed on ashwood tables (*barbara fraxineis pingatur rhuna tabellis*) (cf. Riché 3¹⁹⁷²: 262 n. 277; Düwel *et al.* 1994: 232–233). Although this poem is mere *Spielerei* (cf.

Reydellet 1998: 115 n. 100), it evidences Fortunatus' awareness of the existence of a 'barbarian' runic writing system among other writing systems.

With regard to the runes mentioned last by Fortunatus, reference must be made to Gregory of Tours' *Historiae* 5.44, a passage which describes an innovation of the Latin alphabet in the form of an enrichment proposed by king Chilperic (561–584), possibly with four Germanic runes. After describing the failure of Chilperic's literary ambitions, Gregory reports that the king added a number of letters to the common Latin alphabet (*addit ... et litteras litteris nostris*), and he specifies the sounds represented by these new characters as follows: *id est ω, sicut Graeci habent, ae, the, uui*. This phrase should probably be taken to mean that the sounds represented are respectively /o:/, /ai/, and the 'typically Germanic' sounds /ð/ and /w/ (cf., in last instance, Düwel *et al.* 1994: 232–233). Gregory also lists the characters used to represent these sounds, but the transmission of these characters is problematic. Whereas the PL text (71: 362A) integrates the Greek characters ω ψ ζ Δ, MGH SRM (1/1: 254)—followed by Buchner (1970 [1955]: vol. 1, 364) and Düwel *et al.* (1994: 232)—prints the following characters:¹⁶

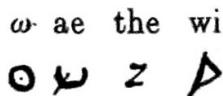


FIGURE 1

It is difficult to establish the reliability of Gregory's report and to say anything definite with regard to the characters actually introduced by Chilperic, or to the reason why they were introduced. Riché (1972: 269) cautiously suggests—following Lot—that the new characters were intended to represent contemporary changes in spoken Latin. Buchner (1970 [1955]: vol. 1, 365 n. 5; tr. mine) straightforwardly argues that Chilperic wanted 'to adapt the Latin alphabet to the needs of the Germanic language', but doubts (unlike Düwel *et al.* 1994: 232) whether Chilperic actually based himself on existing Germanic runes. Interestingly, Gregory also describes how Chilperic tried to institutionalize this orthographical innovation, writing that 'he sent letters (*misit epistulas*) to all the cities in his kingdom, ordering that boys should so be taught and that old books should be erased with pumice-stone and so rewritten'. In line with Gregory's

¹⁶ The characters are here printed in the version of the manuscript BPL 21, folio 2^r, preserved at Leiden University Library, by the kind permission of this institution. For a table with variants in other manuscripts, cf. MGH SRM (1/1: 255).

criticism of the king Chilperic's Arian proclivity and failed literary ambitions, it is clear that he included this information in order to expose the king's alleged self-satisfaction and mismanagement.

The orthographical innovation attempted by king Chilperic is reminiscent of the project of the emperor Claudius, who reigned from 41 to 54 and who according to Suetonius (*De vita Caesarum* 41.3) introduced three new signs in the Latin alphabet, namely the 'inverted digamma' ⟨ȝ⟩ to replace the consonantal ⟨v⟩, the 'antisigma' ⟨ɔ⟩ to replace the groups ⟨ps⟩ or ⟨bs⟩, and an unnamed sign ⟨Ւ⟩ to replace the Latin vowel in between [u] and [i] (cf., in last instance, Desbordes 1990: 188–194 [188–189]). Claudius' innovations (according to Suetonius) enjoyed a considerable circulation during his reign, but they did not survive long afterwards (Desbordes 1990: 59, 173). Although it is possible that Gregory had Suetonius' report of Claudius' innovation in mind when describing Chilperic's innovation, I have found no ground on which this can be confirmed or denied.

Isidore's General Framework for the History of Writing

With regard to Isidore's expositions on the history of writing and writing systems, Fontaine (1959: 58–59; tr. mine) observes that they constitute 'a singular amalgam of pagan and Christian traditions'. He furthermore points out that whereas the Latin grammatical tradition from Varro onwards generally credited the 'Chaldeans' with the invention of the alphabet (cf. above, p. 355), Isidore—due to his extensive reliance on Jerome's relevant works (cf. Fontaine 1959: 201) and in accordance with his ideas on language history (Sect. 2.2, p. 84f.)—follows the Judaeo-Christian belief that 'the Hebrew language is the mother of all languages and letters'. This is indeed the point made by Isidore in *Etym.* 1.3.4, where he deals with the genealogy of the Hebrew, Greek, and Latin alphabets—the alphabets of those three languages which he elsewhere labels 'sacred' (Sect. 7.2, p. 237). He argues that the Latin and Greek letters appear to be derived from the Hebrew ones

for among the Hebrews the first letter is called *aleph*, and then *alpha* was derived from it by the Greeks due to its similar pronunciation (*ex simili enuntiatione*), and hence *a* among Latin speakers. A translator [or: 'the one who passed it on'] (*translator*) fashioned the letter (*litteram condidit*) of one language according to the similar sound of another language (*ex simili sono alterius linguae*), so that we can know that the Hebrew language is the mother of all languages and letters (*omnium linguarum et litterarum ... matrem*).

It can be inferred from this innovative combination of mostly existing material that the perceived genealogy of alphabets presupposes a historically layered process (*prius, deinde*) of borrowing (*tractum est, inde*), as well as the primacy of the Hebrew language and its writing system (Gallagher 2012: 134; Denecker *et al.* 2012: 436). The borrowing of writing systems is presented as a conscious and active process, and it is attached to a supposedly historical individual. Isidore takes the historical development of only one character throughout three alphabets as an indication for the primacy of the Hebrew language and letters—doing so by integrating, in a slightly modified form, Jerome's crucial statement in *Commentarii in prophetas minores* Soph. 3.14/18, where Hebrew is designated as the *omnium linguarum ... matrix* (Sect. 7.3, p. 239). Although it seems safe to infer from Isidore's account that in his opinion, the Latin alphabet as a whole derives from the Hebrew alphabet by way of the Greek one, it is probably not justified to conclude from it that Latin as a language derives from Hebrew by way of Greek. The only language-genealogical point that can be established with certainty on the basis of this passage is that in Isidore's opinion, Hebrew is the 'protolanguage' (Sect. 7.3, p. 247).

The chronological relation between the origins of the respective writing systems indicated by this account is confirmed in book 5 of the *Etymologiae* (cf. *Chronica passim*). At 5.39.9 Isidore notes that 'the Hebrews began to use letters' when Moses was 40 years old (that is in the year 3728)—a notion which runs counter to Augustine's account in *De civitate Dei* 18 (cf. above, p. 358f.). At 5.39.10 Isidore writes that 'Cadmus gave letters to the Greeks' when Othniel was 40 years old (in the year 3795). And in 5.39.11 he notes that 'Carmentis invented the Latin letters' when Jair was 22 years old (in the year 4003). Within the Augustinian periodization of world history, these three events are all situated within the same 'third age' of mankind, stretching from Abraham to David.¹⁷ Fontaine (1959: 201) points out that Isidore's dating of these events in the history of writing constitute a remarkable combination (and even reconciliation) within the long-standing opposition between the Judaeo-Christian tradition on the one hand and pagan wisdom on the other. Isidore's list indeed integrates pagan 'heurematic' traditions into a Judaeo-Christian chronological

¹⁷ Eskhult (2014: 334) summarizes Augustine's doctrine on the epochs of world history as consisting of 'six world-ages that both are compared to the six days of creation and likened to the ages of a man (viz. infancy, childhood, adolescence, youth, adult age, old age)'. These six ages are defined as follows: (1) from Adam to Noah, (2) from Noah to Abraham, (3) from Abraham to David, (4) from Samuel and David to the Babylonian exile, (5) from the exile until Christ's incarnation, (6) from Christ's incarnation until the last judgment. These six ages of the world will be followed by 'the Sabbath of God' (Eskhult 2014: 334–335).

framework. It should be pointed out that by contrast to *Etym.* 1.3.4, Isidore's historical model in the present passage does not presuppose a genealogical connection between the Latin, Greek and Hebrew writing systems.

At 1.3.5 Isidore continues his discussion of the general history of writing systems. The former scope of the three 'sacred' languages is now broadened with Syriac, 'Chaldean'/Aramaic, and Egyptian. Again, Isidore is remarkably concerned with pinpointing an authoritative 'inventor' of the respective writing systems as artificial entities—which is entirely in line with his general 'heuristic curiosity' (Fontaine 1959: 203, 755). As Fontaine (1959: 59) points out, Isidore's information concerning the origin of 'oriental' alphabets evidently relies on 'patristic' and not on pagan sources. In particular, Fontaine notes that the roles given to Moses, Abraham and Isis are drawn from Augustine's *De civitate Dei*. However, I would like to point out (1) that Isidore again contradicts Augustine when stating that the letters of the Hebrew alphabet were initiated by Moses when he gave the Law (cf. above, p. 359 f.), and (2) that for Isidore's statement that the Syriac and 'Chaldean'/Aramaic alphabet(s) was/were initiated by Abraham, no source can be identified in Augustine's works. Instead, it seems useful to connect the statement at issue to *Etym.* 9.1.9 (Sect. 7.3, p. 247), which as Reydellet (1984: 37–38 nn. 15–16) indicates combines material from Ambrose's *Exameron* 1.8.29 and from Jerome's *Commentarii in Danielem* 1.1.4a–c. I would also like to point out that if Isidore actually held that the Syriac and 'Chaldean' alphabet(s) was/were invented by Abraham and the Hebrew alphabet by Moses, this involves the unprecedented view that the Syriac and 'Chaldean' alphabet(s) predate(s) the Hebrew one. Isidore subsequently states that accordingly (*unde*), the Syriac and 'Chaldean' letters 'agree in the number of characters and in their sounds with the Hebrew letters and differ only in their shapes'. It is interesting to observe that Isidore deploys the traditional grammatical terminology of *numerus*, *sonus* and *character* when dealing with these Semitic alphabets (which he did not actually know).

With regard to the Egyptian letters, it is subsequently reported by Isidore that queen Isis, daughter of Inachus (cf. above, p. 359) taught letters to the Egyptians when she came from Greece.¹⁸ Isidore also points out a diastratic and/or diaphasic distinction within the Egyptian writing system. Priests use

¹⁸ Isidore at 8.11.84 informs his readers that Isis when she came from Greece not only taught the Egyptians their letters (*Aegyptios litteras docuit*) but also introduced agriculture (*et terras colere instituit*). From the connection to agriculture, it might be inferred that the availability of a writing system and literacy are considered characteristic of the development of a 'cultivated' society.

'sacred' letters (*sacerdotales*, ἱεραῖς), while the common people use 'common' letters (*uulgares*, πάνδημοι). This distinction reflects the one between the ancient hieroglyphic system—which continued to be used for liturgical purposes—and more recent alphabetical developments on the other hand—which came to be used more commonly ('Demotic').¹⁹ Lastly, Isidore records in his *Historia Gothorum* 8 (MGH AA 11: 270; cf. *Chronica* 1.350) that the Visigothic bishop Ulfila created the Gothic letters (*Gothicas litteras condidit*) and used them to translate the Old and New Testament into Gothic (cf. Lafferty 2003: 54; Delisle & Woodsworth 2012: 4–5).²⁰

Isidore on the Historical Development of the Greek and Latin Alphabets

Having dealt rather cursorily with these more 'exotic' writing systems, Isidore enters into considerable detail at 1.3.6–7, where he gives an account of the historical development of the Greek alphabet which largely agrees to the traditional accounts quoted at the beginning of this section (cf. Fontaine 1959: 59–60; Berschin 1980: 119–120). Isidore singles out the Phoenicians as those who 'invented' (*inuenerunt*) the Greek alphabet. He subsequently distinguishes different layers within the historical development of the Greek alphabet, connecting each of them to an authoritative and allegedly 'historical' individual.

¹⁹ Reference to the Egyptian *litterae sacerdotales* is made in Rufinus' translations of Origen's *In Epistulam Pauli ad Romanos explanationes* (2.9) and of Eusebius of Caesarea's *Historia ecclesiastica* (11.26, 11.29 [GCS 9/2: 1032–1035]). However, given the precision of Isidore's information, we are bound to assume a different ultimate source. I would like to suggest that Varro's lost *De antiquitate litterarum* or another lost work of his, or a lost book of Pliny the Elder's *Naturalis historia* would make a good case to fit this profile, but the information at issue almost certainly came to Isidore as a part of what Fontaine (1959: 316) calls 'l'héritage scolaire indirect'.

²⁰ Isidore's statement can be compared to Jordane's brief mention in his *Getica* 51.267 that the Visigoths (*Gothi minores*) had as their bishop and archbishop Ulfila, 'who is also said to have developed letters for them' (*qui eis dicitur et litteras instituisse*). Likewise, in the *Historia ecclesiastica tripartita*—a translation of a Greek original procured by Epiphanius, one of Cassiodorus' specialized translators in Vivarium—it is reported at 8.13.5 how Ulfila developed the Gothic letters (*litteras Gothicas adiuuenit*) and subsequently turned the holy Bible into Gothic, making use of these letters (*scripturas diuinias in eam conuertit linguam*). It is interesting to note, incidentally, that Isidore's observations on the history of writing and writing systems—including the Gothic alphabet and with extensive attention to the respective 'first inventors'—were integrated in a condensed form by Eugenius of Toledo (d. 647) in *Carmina* 39 and 40 of his *Libellus carminum*, entitled *De inuentoribus litterarum*; cf. now Denecker (forthc.b), with further references.

The ‘bottom layer’ of the Greek alphabet consists of 17 characters ($\alpha \beta \gamma \delta \varepsilon \zeta \iota \kappa \lambda \mu \nu \circ \pi \rho \sigma \tau \phi$) which Cadmus, son of Agenor, brought from Phoenicia to Greece. A second set of three Greek letters ($\eta \chi \omega$) was added during the Trojan war by Palamedes. In a third stage, the lyrical poet Simonides added three more letters ($\psi \xi \theta$). In the fourth and final stage, the philosopher Pythagoras added the letter $\langle v \rangle$ or $\langle Y \rangle$ (Desbordes 1990: 79).²¹ This passage is a detailed exposition of the development of the Greek alphabet, distinguishing four subsequent historical stages each of which connects to an authoritative ‘first inventor’ or $\pi\rho\hat{\omega}\tau\circ\epsilon\nu\rho\epsilon\tau\circ\zeta$.

At 1.4.1 Isidore connects the origin of the Latin alphabet to the nymph Carmentis or Nicostrate, who ‘first brought the Latin letters to the Italians’. In the light of the tradition of literary commentaries discussed in the introduction to this section, it should be understood that the original letters of the Latin alphabet were brought by Carmentis (Evander’s mother) or Nicostrate to Italy *from Greece*. Fontaine (1959: 61) notes that this information occurs in Servius’ *Commentarius in artem Donati* (cf. above, p. 357; *KGL* 4: 421), but that Isidore’s specific source is a commentary on Donatus affiliated with those composed by Servius and ‘Sergius’.²² Within the Latin writing system, Isidore first makes a distinction, on a diastratic axis, between ‘common’ and ‘liberal’ letters (*communes* vs. *liberales*). Fontaine (1959: 61) points out that this distinction between ‘letters of the alphabet’ and ‘belles-lettres’ is apparently Isidore’s own addition (concording with his predilection for *differentiae*), although the terminology used is traditional (cf. Lactantius in Sect. 10.1, p. 343f.). Isidore specifies that ‘common’ letters are so called ‘because many people commonly (*in commune*) employ them in order to write and to read’, whereas ‘liberal’ letters are so called because they are only mastered by ‘those who write books and know how to speak and to compose correctly (*recteque loquendi dictandique rationem*

²¹ Widely known as ‘the letter of Pythagoras’, the letter γ has an important moral symbolic value, the single bottom stroke representing human life until the beginning of adulthood, and at this point splitting up into a morally good (the ‘steep’ right upper stroke) and a morally bad way of life (the ‘downhill’ and easy left upper stroke). This symbolic value is elaborated upon by Isidore, *Etym.* 1.3.7, and is also at issue in Lactantius, *Diuinae institutiones* 6.3.6–8, 6.3.17, Jerome, *Ep.* 66.11.2, 107.6.3, and Ausonius, *Technopaegnion* 14.

²² Apparently, the commentary hinted at by Fontaine is Pompeius, *Commentum artis Donati* (*KGL* 5: 98): *Constat apud omnes Carmentem Nympham illam, Euandi matrem, quae Nicostrata dicebatur, Latinas litteras inuenisse*. Also cf. ‘Sergius’/Servius, *Explanationes in artem Donati* (*KGL* 4: 519): *Latinas litteras inuenisse dicitur Carmentis, mater Euandi, quae proprio nomine Nicostrate dicta est.*

nouerunt'). It is remarkable that this distinction within the Latin writing system is intimately tied in with the mastery of a linguistic norm and with a very specific form of cultural prestige.²³ Possibly, the 'common' letters are to be identified as the 'original' Latin letters, whereas the 'liberal' ones indicate those added to the Latin alphabet for the notation of Greek sounds.

Isidore returns to the historical dimension at 1.4.10–15, making it plain that the old Latin script (*uetus scriptura*) consisted of a core group of 17 letters—the same number of letters that was included in the ancient Greek (Phoenician) alphabet (cf. above, p. 367). Isidore specifies that these 17 letters are called 'legitimate' or 'regular' (*legitimae*), because when read out loud, they are pronounced with the vowel /e/ either prior or subsequent to their proper sounds (cf. Kaster 1988: 141–142). Because of the number of 17 instead of 16 'core letters', this chunk of information possibly traces back to Varro (cf. above, p. 356). Isidore subsequently describes when, why, and by whom other, often 'anomalous' letters were added to the core group. I will here focus on the historical relevance of Isidore's observations, although some of them should be read against the background of the grammatical discussions on 'double' and 'superfluous' letters which go back at least to Varro and which will be introduced below (Sect. 10.4, p. 379f. and p. 381f.).

Isidore informs his readers that the letter ⟨h⟩ was added in a later stage (*postea*) in order to indicate an aspiration (*pro sola aspiratione*)—as a consequence, it is often considered an aspiration or breathing, not a 'full' letter (*aspiratio ... non littera*).²⁴ Isidore moves on to explain that the letter ⟨k⟩ was added by a schoolmaster named Salvius, in order to distinguish neatly between the sounds corresponding to ⟨c⟩ and ⟨q⟩. However, Isidore points out that this letter became unnecessary and superfluous (*superuacula, superflua*), as it is only used for the word *Kalenda*e and otherwise replaced by the letter ⟨c⟩.²⁵ Desbor-

²³ In *Sententiae* 3.13.10 Isidore also connects a moral dimension to the distinction between 'common' and 'liberal' letters: *Simplicioribus litteris non est proponendus fucus grammaticae artis. Meliores sunt enim communes litterae, quia simpliciores, et ad solam humilitatem legentium pertinentes; illae uero nequiores quia ingerunt hominibus perniciosa mentis elationem.*

²⁴ Cf. *Etym.* 1.27.10, where Isidore notes in addition that whereas in Latin, an ⟨h⟩ or aspiration can only be connected to a vowel, in Greek and Hebrew nouns it can also be connected to a consonant: *H, quae aspirationis littera est, in Latino tantum uocalibus iungitur: ut 'honor', 'homo', 'humus' [humilitas]. Aspiratur autem et consonantibus, sed in Graecis et Hebreis nominibus. Heus' autem et 'heu' interiectiones per H scribendae.* Fontaine (1959: 90 with n. 2) points out that when he confines aspirated consonants to Greek and Hebrew, Isidore relies on Jerome's *Liber interpretationis Hebraicorum nominum*.

²⁵ Isidore enters into more detail in *Etym.* 1.27.13, noting that 'the ancients' always used ⟨k⟩

des (1990: 151) in this passage recognizes a possible relic of the tradition which credited a certain Spurius Carvilius—a freedman of the consul of 234 BC (Desbordes 1990: 26, 150)—with the differentiation between ⟨c⟩ and ⟨g⟩ and with the subsequent formal differentiation between ⟨c⟩ and ⟨k⟩. She observes, however, that Isidore's account is ‘irrémédiablement confus—dernier état d'une tradition à bout de souffle’. Isidore subsequently emphasizes that ⟨q⟩ did not belong to the core group of Latin letters (*haec prius non erat*) and that it is thus, like ⟨k⟩, considered superfluous (*superuacua*), since before it was introduced, the ancients (*ueteres*) simply used ⟨c⟩ instead. As Fontaine (1959: 92) points out, Isidore argues further on in book 1 of his *Etymologiae* (1.27.20)—following Cassiodorus—that ⟨q⟩ should only be used in connection with ⟨u⟩ in order to indicate the labialized velar /kw/. Still according to Fontaine, this concords with Varro's opinion with regard to the ⟨q⟩ (cf. below, p. 382 f.).

Isidore furthermore notes that it was not until the time of the emperor Augustus that the ⟨x⟩ came to be used in Latin script, and specifies that it is called a ‘double letter’ (*duplex*; cf. Desbordes 1990: 176–177) because it replaces the sequence of ⟨c⟩ and ⟨s⟩ (which is how it was written before the ⟨x⟩ was introduced). Isidore states that Latin borrowed (*mutuavit Latinitas*) only ⟨y⟩ and ⟨z⟩ from Greek, and that it did so especially in order to write Greek words.²⁶ He points out that it was not until the time of Augustus that ⟨y⟩ and ⟨z⟩ came to be used in Latin script—instead, one would use ⟨ss⟩ for /z/, and ⟨i⟩ for /y/. It should be pointed out that ⟨y⟩ and ⟨z⟩ were actually in use already before the time of Augustus (cf. Desbordes 1990: 153), although Fontaine (1959: 68) argues that Isidore's observation is quite correct if it is taken to mean that it is not before the time of Augustus that the signs ⟨x⟩, ⟨y⟩ and ⟨z⟩ were admitted by the grammarians in *normative* orthography. On a more general level, Fontaine (1959: 67; tr. mine) suggests on the ground of the ‘suspicious exactness’ of

in front of an ⟨a⟩, adding *Karthago* to *Kalendae* as a relic of this usage, and pointing out that all Greek words with a *kappa* ⟨x⟩ are transliterated in Latin with a ⟨k⟩. Fontaine (1959: 92 with n. 1) points out that the issue is settled differently by Audax, *Excerpta de Scauri et Palladii libris* (KGL 7: 326), and by Marius Victorinus, *Ars grammatica* (KGL 6: 195), but that Isidore in the present passage follows Pompeius, *Commentum artis Donati* (KGL 5: 110): *Maiores nostri, quotienscumque a sequebatur, per k scribebant: puta kanna karus kalamus totum per k scribebant, quoniam a sequebatur. Modo non scribuntur nisi duo admodum uerba, Karthago et Kalendae, et, ut dicit ille, quod falsum est, caput.*

26 At 1.27.28 Isidore repeats that ⟨y⟩ and ⟨z⟩ are only used for writing Greek words. With regard to contemporary linguistic reality, he points out that *iustitia* is pronounced with a /z/—that is, presumably, /iustitsia/—but that it should still be written with a ⟨t⟩ since it is a Latin word; cf. Burton (2008a).

Isidore's historical indications in this passage that his information might go back in some way to Varro's lost treatise *De antiquitate litterarum*.

3 The Alphabet as an Organizing Principle for Literary Works

As is still the case today, the alphabet in antiquity often provided the backbone by which to structure or organize documentary or literary corpora (cf. Daly 1967). Lexica are and were mostly organized alphabetically, and a literary oeuvre as famous as Homer's was organized according to the letters of the Greek alphabet—these are of course two very different applications of the same principle. In the Christian tradition more specifically, the alphabet was used to organize exegetical tools such as those developed by Jerome, but also 'literary' works, and this both on the macro- and on the microlevel (going from books to verses). Due exactly to this organizing function, the number of characters included in the alphabet plays a prominent role. Over and again, early Christian Latin authors remind their readers of the fact that the Hebrew alphabet counts 22 letters, the Latin alphabet 23, and the Greek alphabet 24. A representative instance summarizing an entire Latin Christian tradition is provided by Isidore, who in *Etym.* 1.3.4 cites the numbers of letters included in these respective alphabets and observes that as regards the number of letters, 'speakers of Latin walk a middle way between both languages (*inter utramque linguam progredientes*)' (cf. Fontaine 1959: 59).

The Psalms: From Hilary to Cassiodorus

In the Hebrew source text of the Old Testament, several psalms are organized according to the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet. The most prototypical and most well-known example is Ps. 118, which consists of 22 alphabetically arranged groups of each time eight verses beginning with the corresponding letter of the Hebrew alphabet, and which contains moral or ethical instructions (cf. Schirner 2016). Other examples are Ps. 110, 111, 112 and 144, which have only one verse corresponding to, and beginning with, the successive letters of the Hebrew alphabet, and Ps. 24, 27 and 36, which display some irregularities (cf. below, p. 373). Graves (2007a: 50–51 n. 125) points out that the alphabetical arrangement of these psalms was a known fact among Christian authors at least since Origen. This is shown by a Palestinian *catena* commentary on Ps. 118, which in its introduction includes a fragment from Origen's otherwise lost commentary on this psalm. In this passage, Origen thematizes the alphabetical organization of the psalm and argues that 'this psalm comprises the entire ethical system' as it occurs in the Bible. As Harl points out in her introduction to

this Palestinian *catena* (SC 189: 110), other early Christian Greek authors, such as Eusebius of Caesarea and Hesychius, were also aware of the alphabetical organization of Ps. 118. In addition, she notes (SC 189: 109–110) that Eusebius was familiar with Greek glosses to the Hebrew letter names (*aleph* = μάθησις, *beth* = σῖχος, *gimel* = πλήρωσις, etc.), which allow for a symbolic or allegorical interpretation of the psalms at issue. This symbolic interpretation of the Hebrew letters evidently has a Jewish origin and persists into the Latin tradition (Harl in SC 189: 109 n. 1). It is based on the fact that the Hebrew letters have names based partly on the shape of the letters they denote, partly on the principle of ‘acrophony’—i.e. the name begins with the letter it denotes—and that these names have the status of Hebrew words which can thus be interpreted in various ways.

The alphabetical organization is a prominent theme in early Christian Latin authors’ exegesis of the psalms at issue, and the ‘universalist’ or ‘comprehensive’ character of the alphabet is repeatedly connected to their ‘moral’ or ‘ethical’ significance (primarily in the case of Ps. 118). Hilary of Poitiers—who probably relies on Origen’s exegesis (cf. Milhau in SC 344: 19 and, more generally, Berschin 1980: 63)—in *Tractatus super Psalmos* instr. 14–15 draws attention to the organization of Ps. 118 according to the Hebrew alphabet, and points out that the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet correspond to the 22 canonical books of the Old Testament. He specifies that some people include Tobit and Judith in order to reach 24 books, a number which then corresponds to the number of letters of which the Greek alphabet consists. In *Tractatus super Psalmos* 118 pref. 5 Hilary deals with the alphabetical organization of Ps. 111, 112 and 118, giving a moral interpretation to the latter psalm. He argues that when this psalm covers the complete alphabet with each time 8 verses, this was done so ‘in order for us—because that psalm summarizes the perfect man according to evangelical doctrine—to be educated under the sacrament of the number eight, all along the twenty-two letters of the Hebrew language’.²⁷ With only minor variations, this moral interpretation can also be found at 118 pref. 3, 118.2.1, 118.16.1, and 118.22.1. Milhau (SC 344: 20) rightly points out that by contrast to Ambrose (and Jerome) (cf. below), Hilary never quotes the Hebrew letters by

²⁷ This moral interpretation is elaborated upon in more detail in *Tractatus super Psalmos* 118 pref. 1, where Hilary emphasizes the fact that children and other people who learn to read first need to learn the letters of the alphabet in order to form words with them. He argues that in exactly the same way, human ignorance, ‘by way of this eightfold number of each single letter’, and ‘as it were by the very principles of childhood education’ (*ipsis uelut infantilis doctrinae inititiis*) is instructed by Ps. 118 ‘in morals, discipline, and the knowledge of God’.

their Hebrew names and, as a consequence, does not connect symbolic glosses to these names.

The same line of exegesis is followed by Ambrose (cf. Pizzolato 1978: 278–279), who applies it in his *Expositio Psalmi cxviii*, which as its title shows is entirely devoted to Ps. 118. It is important to note that Ambrose had a firm direct acquaintance with Origen's works in general, and that his exegesis of Ps. 118 is based on Origen's commentary on the same psalm, insofar as it can be reconstructed from the fragment preserved in the Palestinian *catena* discussed above (Savon 1998: 231–232). In 14.1 Ambrose states that this 'moral' psalm is organized according to the letters of the Hebrew alphabet, in order that the reader, 'formed, so to speak, as a little child and from infancy onwards, in the letters of the alphabet ... can grow up to maturity of virtue (*usque ad maturitatem uirtutis excrescat*)'. In § 3 of the preface, he notes that Ps. 110 and 111, too, are alphabetically organized moral psalms, and he points out that not only Hebrew names, but also the letters of the Hebrew alphabet allow for interpretation. Throughout the work, Ambrose for each character of the Hebrew alphabet quotes the rank (*ordo*) it occupies in the alphabet, its full Hebrew name, and a Latin translation or 'gloss' of this name, possibly on the basis of original Greek glosses provided by Eusebius of Caesarea (cf. Harl in SC 189:109). He then starts from this gloss in giving an allegorical interpretation. The letter names and glosses provided by Ambrose can be listed as follows:²⁸

1. א aleph	<i>doctrina</i>	12. ב labd	<i>cor, seruo</i>
2. ב beth	<i>confusio</i>	13. ג mem	<i>ex intimis, ignis ex ultimis</i>
3. ג gimel	<i>retributio</i>	14. ד nun	<i>unicus, pascua eorum</i>
4. ד deleth	<i>timor, natiuitas</i>	15. ס samech	<i>audi, firmamentum</i>
5. ה he	<i>est, uiuo</i>	16. ו ain	<i>oculus, fons</i>
6. ו uau	<i>uel sic non ille, et non est</i>	17. פ phe	<i>errauit, os aperui</i>
7. ז zain	<i>duc te, huc</i>	18. צ sade	<i>consolatio</i>
8. ח eth	<i>pauor</i>	19. צ cof	<i>conclusio, aspice</i>
9. ט teth	<i>exclusio</i>	20. ר res	<i>caput, primatus</i>
10. י ioth	<i>confessio, desolatio</i>	21. ש sin	<i>super uulnus</i>
11. כ caph	<i>curuati sunt</i>	22. ת tau	<i>errauit, consummauit</i>

Around the same time, Jerome explains in the preface to *Tractatus in Psalmos* 119 (CCSL 78: 246; cf. *Commentarioli in Psalmos* 118) that just as we need to

²⁸ This list was composed on the basis of *Expositio Psalmi cxviii* 1.1, 2.1, 3.1, 4.1, 5.1, 6.1, 7.1, 8.1, 9.1, 10.1, 11.1, 12.1, 13.1, 14.1, 15.1, 16.1, 17.1, 18.1, 19.1, 20.1, 21.1, 22.1.

learn our letters if we want to read, we first need to know the moral 'elements' if we want to understand the Bible. Accordingly, he argues that Ps. 118 is a 'moral alphabetical psalm' (*psalmus alfabetites moralis*) which 'teaches us how to live'. Likewise, in the preface to his translation of Kings, Jerome connects the 22 Hebrew letters to the 22 canonical books of the Old Testament (cf. Kelly 1975: 160), and argues that just as the 22 Hebrew letters cover all that can be said in that language, it is through the basic teachings of the 22 books of the Old Testament that 'the infancy of a just man ... is educated in the learning of God'.²⁹ In *Ep. 30.1–12* (cf. *Ep. 106*) Jerome comments on the alphabetical organization of, and on the differences between, Ps. 110, 111, 118 and 144. He also repeats the analogy between, on the one hand, the function of letters in the process of learning to read and, on the other, the function of the 'moral alphabetical psalms' in learning to understand the Bible. Subsequently, Jerome adds a list of (mystical) interpretations or translations (glosses) for each of the Hebrew letters. It is important to emphasize that this had already been done by Ambrose, but that there are significant differences between Ambrose's and Jerome's interpretations. It is very conceivable that Jerome aimed to supersede the interpretations proposed by Ambrose, who was one of his most prominent opponents (cf. Introduction, p. 16). It should be pointed out that Jerome's glosses are indeed more 'correct' than those provided by Ambrose. The table on p. 374 summarizes Jerome's list of interpretations, which he deploys exegetically in the remainder of his letter by combining them to 'meaningful' phrases.

Augustine presumably relies on Jerome when he explains in *Enarrationes in Psalmos* 118.21.2 that in Ps. 118 'each time eight verses are subjected to each Hebrew letter'. In *Enarrationes in Psalmos* 118.32.8 he connects the structure of Ps. 118 to the contemporary composition of Latin and Punic *psalmi abecedarii*, alphabetical psalms or songs. He emphasizes, however, that the biblical alphabetical psalms are composed with much more care than the Latin or Punic *psalmi abecedarii*. It is interesting to note in this connection that Augustine himself composed a *psalmus abecedarius* against the Donatists, which is preserved as *Psalmus contra partem Donati* (Tilley 1999a: 35, 1999b; Hunink 2011;

29 Throughout his *Commentarioli in Psalmos* Jerome does not fail to make his readers aware of the specifics of the alphabetical organization of the psalms at issue. He notes at 110 that in Ps. 24 and 36 'either some letters are lacking (*desunt*) or there are too much of them (*supersunt*)'; and at 27 that the first option also applies to Ps. 27 (*excepta una littera*). Ps. 110, 111 and 144, he furthermore notes, are complete alphabetical psalms, although in the latter case the letter *nun* has been added in the Septuagint, whereas it is lacking in the Hebrew original.

1.	א	<i>aleph</i>	<i>doctrina</i>	12.	ל	<i>lamed</i>	<i>disciplinae, cordis</i>
2.	ב	<i>beth</i>	<i>domus</i>	13.	מ	<i>mem</i>	<i>ex ipsi</i>
3.	ג	<i>gimel</i>	<i>plenitudo</i>	14.	נ	<i>nun</i>	<i>sempiternum</i>
4.	ד	<i>deleth</i>	<i>tabularum</i>	15.	ס	<i>samech</i>	<i>adiutorium</i>
5.	ה	<i>he</i>	<i>ista</i>	16.	ע	<i>ain</i>	<i>fons, oculus</i>
6.	ו	<i>uau</i>	<i>et</i>	17.	פ	<i>phe</i>	<i>os (gen. oris)</i>
7.	ז	<i>zai</i>	<i>haec</i>	18.	צ	<i>sade</i>	<i>iustitiae</i>
8.	ח	<i>heth</i>	<i>uita</i>	19.	ק	<i>coph</i>	<i>uocatio</i>
9.	ט	<i>teth</i>	<i>bonum</i>	20.	ר	<i>res</i>	<i>capitis</i>
10.	ׁ	<i>iod</i>	<i>principium</i>	21.	ׂ	<i>sen</i>	<i>dentium</i>
11.	ׂ	<i>caph</i>	<i>manus</i>	22.	ׁ	<i>tau</i>	<i>signa</i>

Van Reyn 2014). Looking back in *Retractationes* 1.20 Augustine comments on the didactic and mnemonic advantages of this approach, especially for a less educated audience. In the beginning of the 6th century, Fulgentius of Ruspe follows Augustine's lead when composing an alphabetical psalm against the Arians (Riché 3¹⁹⁷²: 134).

Cassiodorus, who highly esteems and intensely relies on Hilary and Jerome, thematizes the organizing capacity of the Hebrew alphabet in his *Expositio Psalmorum* (cf. O'Donnell 1979: 146).³⁰ In the preface (CCSL 97: 4) Cassiodorus announces that some of the psalms he is about to discuss will be 'profound in the virtue of the Hebrew alphabet' (*Hebraei alphabeti uirtute profundi*). And in *Expositio Psalmorum* 24.1 (CCSL 97: 221) he notes—on the authority of Jerome—that some of the Hebrew characters stand for Hebrew words and as such have a mystical value (cf. *Expositio Psalmorum* 36.1 [CCSL 97: 324] and the preface to 118 [CCSL 98A: 1059]). On the authority of Hilary, Cassiodorus explains at 110.1 that this was done so because, just as children and uneducated people learn the alphabet 'in order to acquire the precepts of wisdom', alphabetical psalms

³⁰ In *Inst. 1.12.2* Cassiodorus furthermore states that Jerome arranged the books of the Old Testament according to the 22 letters of the Hebrew alphabet. According to Cassiodorus, the symbolic value of this arrangement consists in the fact that through the Hebrew letters 'all wisdom is learned and the memory of what was said has been preserved in written form'. Again, when commenting in *Expositio Psalmorum* 22.6 on Ps. 22 (CCSL 97: 214), he argues that the ordinal number of this psalm 'indicates the perfection of wisdom' because of its agreement with the number of canonical Old Testament books and of Hebrew letters, which 'were imparted on the human race in order to understand the fulness of divine knowledge'.

are given to children and beginners in faith (*pueris et incipientibus*), so that their basics are taught (*ut primordia ... instruantur*) as it were through certain instructing elements (*quasi quibusdam elementis docentibus*).

At 118.176, Cassiodorus adds a number of apparently original elements to this topical line of exegesis, in order to make a specific theological or ecclesiological point. He observes that Ps. 118 is the third one, after Ps. 110 and 111, to cover the complete Hebrew alphabet, and states that these three psalms symbolize Trinity. He furthermore argues that the four ‘incomplete’ alphabetical psalms—Ps. 24, 33, 36 and 144—correspond to the four cardinal points (North, East, South, and West) and thus symbolize the universality of the Catholic Church. At 144.1 (CCSL 98A: 1289–1290), Cassiodorus explains on an allegorical or symbolic line of interpretation that the complete alphabetical psalms symbolize the *iusti*, who thanks to God’s grace do not lack a single virtue. The incomplete alphabetical psalms, to the contrary, symbolize those people who belong to the Church, but who are not perfectly versed in all good works (*non adeo cunctis bonis operibus ... perfecti*). In other words, the incomplete alphabetical psalms symbolize the present Church which still includes the unjust, while the complete alphabetical psalms symbolize the ‘future Jerusalem’, which will include only the ‘gathering of the perfectly saintly’.³¹

Other Literary Works: Venantius Fortunatus and Fulgentius the Mythographer

The organizing capacity of the alphabet comes in when Venantius Fortunatus explains his method in composing his *carmen figuratum* on the cross in *Carmen* 5.6.15, the accompanying letter to the poem, addressed to Syagrius of Autun. Fortunatus expounds that at the center of the cross he placed the Latin letter *m*, ‘which stands in the very middle of the 23 letters of the alphabet (*inter uiginti tres ... permedia*)’, and which as such has as many letters standing in front of it as following behind. Fortunatus furthermore states that due to its central position in the *carmen figuratum* on the cross, this single letter serves four times: ‘this letter is divided in its entirety (*diuiditur tota*) over the verses that concur in it (*concurrentibus uersibus*), and although the matter is divided, it remains whole (*et manet integra res diuisa*)’. The organization of the alphabet thus lends coherence to Fortunatus’ literary *Spielerei*.

31 On the distinction between complete and incomplete alphabetical psalms, also cf. *Expositio Psalmorum* 24.1 and 110.1.

The organizing capacity of the alphabet occupies an important place in Fulgentius the mythographer's *De aetatibus mundi et hominis*, due to the fact that it was conceived as a so-called 'lipogrammatic' work. This means that the work was planned to consist of 23 chapters according to the number of letters in the Latin alphabet (only 14 of which were completed or have been preserved), each of these chapters omitting the corresponding letter (Schneider 2002a: 273). In § 3 of the preface Fulgentius refers to such a Greek lipogrammatic work composed by a poet named Xenophon, which consisted of 24 books according to the letters of the Greek alphabet. Fulgentius in § 4 moves on to discuss his own alphabet, which he refers to by the phrase *Romuleis Libicisque litteris*. An important question raised by this phrase is whether *Libicus* is to be identified as a particular 'Libyan' language with its own alphabet. Whereas some have answered this question in the positive, Hays (2004: 104–105) points out that in spite of Fulgentius' reference to 'Libyan', his work is composed in Latin and not in some other, 'African' language. Furthermore, Hays draws attention to the fact that due to the lipogrammatic format of the work, Fulgentius in the preface and in the first book could not use the letter ⟨a⟩, and thus also had to avoid the adjective *Latinus*. On this basis, Hays plausibly suggests that 'the phrase *Romuleis Libicisque litteris* may signify simply 'the language spoken alike by Romans and Africans'—that is to say, Latin'.

Fulgentius argues that his own Latin alphabet, with its 23 characters, holds a middle position between Hebrew and Greek, and that because of this *unicus ordo*, the Latin alphabet is not only the organizing principle for his work, but also for all human speech and for human life as a whole. As such, it provides the ideal structure for a work on the ages of world and man—*De aetatibus mundi et hominis*. On the basis of these interconnections (*noduli*), the work as it is conceived will consist of 23 chapters or books according to the 23 characters of the Latin alphabet, successively describing the 23 ages of human life and of world history. The gradual completion of the alphabet thus corresponds to the growth of man and to the 'life' of the world. Fulgentius concludes his preface by calculating the life span of the world, relying in order to do so on the numeral value of the letters of the alphabet.

4 Specific Comments and Contrastive Observations

The present section deals with specific comments and contrastive observations on writing systems made by early Christian Latin authors. Unsurprisingly, the works of Jerome are an extremely rich source for observations of this kind. These observations relate directly to Jerome's activities in trilingual biblical

philology. It is not seldom the case that Jerome compares different signs or writing systems in order to make an exegetical point. Whereas the older investigations of Siegfried (1884), Sutcliffe (1948), and Barr (1967) primarily aim to reconstruct the pronunciation of Hebrew current in Jerome's days, I will in this section focus on the level of metalinguistic reflection and discuss Jerome's observations (1) on the general complexity of the Hebrew graphophonetic system, (2) on the vowels in the Hebrew graphophonetic system, (3) on 'double letters' and misleading similarities in the Hebrew graphophonetic system, (4) on the Hebrew letters corresponding to Latin ⟨a⟩, ⟨g⟩, and ⟨s⟩, (5) on 'superfluous' and 'lacking' letters, and (6) on aspirates in Hebrew and Greek. Lastly (7), I will also discuss some isolated contrastive observations made by Ausonius.

Jerome on the General Complexity of the Hebrew Graphophonetic System

Jerome very frequently comments on technical issues relating to the letters of the Hebrew alphabet. In the most basic case, he simply spells out the word as it stands in the Hebrew source text by means of the Hebrew characters, in order to point out which one of two closely resembling Hebrew words is actually meant. In this section, I have selected those passages where Jerome also tells us something more with regard to these technical issues, thus moving on to the level of explicit metalinguistic reflection. Jerome in *Commentarii in Ezechielem* 8.27.18 comments on the general complexity of the Hebrew graphophonetic system, and on its implications for Bible translation and biblical exegesis. He states that

it frequently occurs that Hebrew names/nouns can be interpreted in various ways (*uarie interpretantur*), in accordance with the diversity of accents (*pro diuersitate accentuum*) and the alteration of letters and vowels (*et mutatione litterarum uocaliumque*), and—most of all—of those which have their peculiarities (*proprietates suas*) in Hebrew.

Jerome is more specific with regard to the pronunciation of Hebrew letters in *Commentarii in epistulas Paulinas* Tit. 3.9. It is important to stress that this passage involves linguistic value judgments that are based on the sociocultural connotations that are for Jerome attached to the Jews (Sect. 7.4, p. 249f.). In the passage concerned, Jerome indignantly states that the Jews are wont to laugh at Christians when the latter pronounce Hebrew names in an incorrect way (*corrupte*), as they are unfamiliar with the etymologies of these names. Jerome expounds that non-natives easily make mistakes with regard to the accent (*in accentu*), with regard to the length or shortness of a syllable (*in extensione et*

breuitate syllabae),³² and most of all with regard to those sounds which are still today considered typically ‘Eastern’ or ‘Semitic’, namely aspirations and ‘certain letters which are to be pronounced with a scraping of the throat (*cum rasura gulae*)’. In addition, Jerome refers to Hebrew letters with a double aspiration and to the three letters *s* in Hebrew (cf. below, p. 381). If a non-native does not manage to pronounce these sounds as a Jew would do, Jerome concludes, ‘they are wont to raise laughter and to swear that they have no idea of what we are saying’.

With specific reference to the number of letters they consist of, Jerome also makes a number of observations on the relationship between the Hebrew alphabet on the one hand and the Syriac and ‘Chaldean’ (Aramaic) alphabets on the other. It has been explained above (p. 357f.) that speakers of Hebrew initially used the same characters as the Samaritans but then switched to Aramaic characters, although Jerome believed that Aramaic had borrowed the Hebrew characters. In the preface to his translation of Kings, Jerome points out that the fact that the Hebrew alphabet counts 22 letters is also shown by the language of Syrians and Chaldeans (Aramaic), which he states ‘is to a large extent similar to the Hebrew language’ (Sect. 7.3, p. 241). In a passage which will be integrated by Isidore (*Etym.* 1.3.5), Jerome specifies that the 22 letters of Syrians and Chaldeans ‘have the same sound (*eodem sono*), but are written with different characters (*sed diuersis caracteribus*)’. Furthermore, Jerome informs his readers that the Samaritans, too, write the Pentateuch down ‘with the same number of letters (*totidem litteris scriptitant*), differing only in the shapes and marks of the letters (*figuris tantum et apicibus discrepantes*)’.

Jerome on Vowels in the Hebrew Graphophonetic System

Jerome obliquely comments on the fact that no vowels are noted in the Hebrew script of his days. He points out in *In Hieremiam prophetam libri sex* 2.82.1 that the Hebrew word דְבָר can be read as *dabar*, ‘word’, as *deber*, ‘death’, or as *dabber*, ‘to speak’. This equivocality, he explains, is due to the fact that the word ‘has no vowels between these letters’ (*uocales enim in medio non habet*). With regard to the same equivocal word, he notes in *Commentarii in prophetas minores* Hab. 2.3.5 that the Hebrew word consists of the three letters *daleth*, *beth* and *resh*, ‘without any vowel’ (*absque ulla uocali*). In *In Hieremiam prophetam libri sex* 5.27.3 Jerome points out that in the words *babel* and *sesach*, the vowels

³² Cf. *Liber interpretationis Hebraicorum nominum* 5–6, 9, 27 and *Commentarii in Isaiam* 17.61.4/5, where Jerome makes a distinction between a short (*breuis*) and a long (*producta, extensa*) quantity for /e/ and /o/.

(*uocales ... litterae*) are not indicated, ‘in accordance with the idiom of the Hebrew language’ (*iuxta ἑβραικὴν γλῶσσαν Hebraeae*). Jerome is also familiar with the use of consonant signs as so-called *matres lectionis*, in order to make up for the lack of vowel signs. He obliquely comments on this use in *Commentarii in prophetas minores* Abd. 1 (CCSL 76: 355), stating that the Hebrew letter *waw* (ו) may indicate either /u/ or /o/. At Os. 1.2.8 he points out that the idol name בָּעֵל can be pronounced either as *be(e)l* or as *baal*—as Sidonians and Phoenicians do—because *ayin* (ע), the *uocalis littera* between the consonants *beth* (ב) and *lamed* (ל), can indicate either /e/ or /a/, ‘according to the proper nature of that language’ (*iuxta linguam illius proprietatem*).³³ It is important to note that the lack of vowel signs and the use of *matres lectionis*, too, are explicitly connected to the ‘proper nature’ of Hebrew.

Jerome on ‘Double Letters’ and Misleading Similarities in the Hebrew Graphic System

In the preface to his translation of Kings, Jerome comments on the fact that five Hebrew letters can be written in two different ways, depending on the place they occupy within the word. These five ‘double letters’ (*litterae duplices*)—*kaf*, *mem*, *nun*, *pe*, and *tsade*—are written in one way at the beginning or in the middle of a word (*principia medietatesque*), and in another at the end of a word (*fines*). The (real) distinction referred to by Jerome is the following:

kaf (כ) final form (ך) | *mem* (מ) fin. (ם) | *nun* (נ) fin. (ן) | *pe* (פ) fin. (ף) |
tsade (צ) fin. (צ)

On various occasions, Jerome also points out the misleading similarity between different Hebrew characters. He often does so in demonstrating the correctness of his own translation against others. As Graves (2007a: 58) puts it, ‘Jerome was especially fond of relaying information of this nature, because it gave him a chance to prove the indispensability of knowing Hebrew’. First, Jerome points out in *Commentarii in prophetas minores* Os. 2.9.5/6 that the similarity (*similitudine litterarum*) between *daleth* (ד) and *kaf* (כ or ק) has misled the translators of the Septuagint, leading them to read *machmas* instead of *mamad*—it remains unclear to me how this alleged confusion should exactly be understood. Second, Jerome argues at Am. 1.1.3 that the translators of the Septuagint were mistaken in their translation of Hebrew *mebbeth eden*, ‘believing that the

33 Jerome’s observation might reflect a dialectal difference in the pronunciation of the word, possibly due to contact influence from Akkadian, which has *belu*.

daleth (daleth) in the middle of the noun was a *resh* (resh) and thus reading *mebbeth eren*. Third, Jerome at Zach. 3.12.9/10 in the same commentary explains the confusion between Hebrew *ephod bad* and *ephod bar* with reference to the similarity between *daleth* and *resh*, which ‘are distinguished from each other only by a small mark’ (*paruo tantum apice distinguuntur*).³⁴ Fourth, Jerome at Zach. 1.5.5/8 demonstrates that the similarity between *waw* (waw) and *iod* (iod)—used in this case as *matres lectionis* for *o* and *e* respectively—gave rise to the confusion between Hebrew *onam* and *enam*. He explains that because both letters are of the same shape (*litterae eadem forma*) but of different size (*sed mensura diuersae*), it often happens that one of them is read instead of the other.³⁵ Fifth and last, Jerome notes in *Commentarioli in Psalmos* 51 that the name *Achimelech* from the verse at issue is written *Abimelech* elsewhere. He ascribes this confusion to the fact that the Hebrew letters *beth* (beth) and *kaf* (kaf) ‘are distinguished only by a moderate-sized mark’ (*modico apice distinguuntur*), by which he possibly means the small stroke on top of the *beth*.

Jerome on the Hebrew Letters Corresponding to Latin (a), (g), and (s)

Jerome makes a number of contrastive remarks involving Latin, Greek, and various Semitic writing systems—mostly in close connection with textual differences in the various Bible versions. In *Liber interpretationis Hebraicorum nominum* 2 he emphasizes the fact that a Latin (a) does not necessarily correspond to a Hebrew *aleph* (aleph), but that biblical names beginning with an (a) in Latin may begin in Hebrew with *ayin* (ayin), *he* (he), or *heth* (heth)—‘letters which differ from each other in [or: which mutually exchange] their aspirations and their names (*quae aspirationes suas uocesque commutant*)’. This means that biblical names which in Latin begin with one vowel (*a uocali littera*), may begin in Hebrew with various letters (*a diuersis ... elementis*)—all of them being consonants. Secondarily, the consequence is that one biblical name in Latin may correspond to different names in Hebrew, and may thus have various possible interpretations. Likewise, Jerome points out that biblical names beginning

- 34 Jerome deals with the graphic similarity between *daleth* and *resh* on many more occasions, cf. *Commentarii in Ezechielem* 2.6.14, 7.20.45/49, 8.27.15/16, *Commentarii in Isaiam* 3.8.9/10, 12.44.24/28, *In Hieremiam prophetam libri sex* 3.55., *Ep. 78.11.2*, *Commentarius in Ecclesiasten* 8.6/7, *Commentarii in prophetas minores* Soph. 3.8/9 (CCSL 76A: 702), Abd. 1 (CCSL 76: 355).
- 35 The graphic similarity between *waw* and *iod*, too, is frequently commented upon by Jerome, cf. *Commentarii in prophetas minores* Zach. 3.13.7/9, Os. 1.4.15/16, Hab. 1.2.2/4, *Ep. 106.7.8*, *Commentarii in Ezechielem* 2.7.13c, *Commentarii in Isaiam* 4.10.5/11, *Quaestiones Hebraicae in Genesim* 41.2.

with a ⟨g⟩ in Latin—such as *Gomorra* (6) or *Gaza* (22, 27, 69)—in Hebrew do not begin with a *gimel* ⟨ג⟩ or another (actual) consonant, ‘but with a voiced *ayin*’ (*per uocalem γ*). It should be pointed out that many of Jerome’s observations may be based on a comparison of the columns in Origen’s *Hexapla*.

Jerome also comments on the striking variety of sibilants in the Hebrew graphophonetic system. In *Liber interpretationis Hebraicorum nominum* 10 he points out that just as a Latin vowel does not necessarily correspond exclusively to a Hebrew one, the same should be observed with regard to the Latin letter ⟨s⟩. He expounds that ‘among the Hebrews there are three letters s’ (*apud Hebreos tres s sunt litterae*),³⁶ namely (1) *samech* ⟨ס⟩, which ‘is simply read as if it was written with our letter s’ (*simpliciter legitur quasi per s nostram litteram describatur*),³⁷ (2) *shin* ⟨ש⟩, ‘in which a certain hiss resounds which is foreign to our language’ (*in qua stridor quidam non nostri sermonis interstrepit*),³⁸ and (3) *tsade* ⟨ת⟩, ‘which our ears totally abhor’ (*quam aures nostrae penitus reformidant*). It is important to observe that while suggesting to provide an objective analysis, Jerome integrates a number of negative linguistic value judgments. At 62 Jerome specifies that *tsade* corresponds neither to the Latin /s/ nor to /z/ (*quod nec s nec z littera sonat*). Due to this diversity of sibilants, names which are written in the same way in Latin may be written in different ways in Hebrew, and may thus call for different interpretations.

Jerome on ‘Superfluous’ and ‘Lacking’ Letters

The theme of ‘superfluous’ and of ‘lacking’ letters in the alphabet is an important one throughout the Latin grammatical tradition from Lucilius (fr. 14 Funaioli) onwards (Desbordes 1990: 173–174), and it is inextricably tied in with the grammarians’ interest in the number of letters which the alphabet consists of (cf. Desbordes 1990: 173–185 on ‘superfluous’, and 187–200 on ‘lacking’ letters). An illustrative example of the Latin grammarians’ interest in this matter is provided, again, by the polymath Varro. In reconstructing Varro’s thought on the issue, Desbordes (1990: 148) refers to the statement in ‘Sergius’/Servius, *Explanationes in artem Donati*, that ‘although there are 23 Latin letters, Varro says that there are 17; he thinks the others are superfluous (*ceteras superfluas*

36 Cf. *Commentarii in prophetas minores* Am. pref.: ... et s litterae quae apud Hebreos triplex est and *Commentarii in epistulas Paulinas* Tit. 3.9: *Nam nos et Graeci unam tantum litteram s habemus, illi uero tres, samech, sade, et sin: quae diuersos sonos possident.*

37 Cf. *Commentarii in Ezechielem* 8.27.22: ... ‘samech’ quae nostrae litterae similis est; cf. Isidore, *Etym.* 9.2.18.

38 Cf. *Quaestiones Hebraicae in Genesim* 26.32–33: ... pro stridulo Hebraeorum sin, a quo sabee incipitur, Graecum simma, id est Hebraeum samech posuit.

putat)' (*KGL* 4: 519). Desbordes furthermore notes (cf. Collart 1954: 115, 118) that this statement can be specified by the grammarian Diomedes' assertion in *Ars grammatica* that 'some have thought that 17 letters sufficed for Latin speech (*Latino sermoni sufficere*) since of the 23 letters one is an aspiration mark (*aspirationis nota*), h, one is double (*duplex*), x [*(cs)*], two are superfluous (*superacuae*), k and q, and two are Greek, y and z' (*KGL* 1: 423). Apart from 'Sergius' and Diomedes, evidence for Varro's position can be gathered from Priscian's *Ars grammatica* (*KGL* 2: 13) and from a fragment of Cormutus preserved in Cassiodorus' *De orthographia* (*KGL* 7: 153) (Collart 1954: 95; Desbordes 1990: 175). In elucidating Varro's position in the matter concerned, Collart (1978b: 12–13) suggests that the polymath maintained a very clear orthographical principle, positing one sound for each sign and one sign for each sound (cf. Desbordes 1990: 124). However, it is important to emphasize with Desbordes (1990: 175–176) that it was most probably not Varro's intention to 'condemn' the signs concerned and to exclude them from usage, but rather to designate them as 'problematic' letters with regard to the relation between sign and sound.

Some of these traditional views on superfluous and lacking letters are integrated and/or reinterpreted by Jerome within the contrastive framework of his trilingual biblical philology. The debated status of ⟨h⟩ as either a *littera* or a *nota* (cf. Desbordes 1990: 179–181) comes in a couple of times in Jerome's lexicographically conceived and alphabetically organized *Liber interpretationis Hebraicorum nominum*. He states at 61 to have omitted 'the aspiration h' (*aspirationem h*) at the beginning of most words, 'although the grammarians do not even think it should be considered a letter' (*licet eam grammatici non putent litterae loco habendam*). Again at 22 he notes that ⟨h⟩ 'is considered by most people (*a plerisque*) to be an aspiration (*aspiratio*), not a letter (*non littera*)'. A notable exception to the *grammatici* and the *plerique* referred to by Jerome was the grammarian Scaurus, who lived under Hadrian and who in his *De orthographia* (*KGL* 7: 22–23) defended the status of ⟨h⟩ as a 'full' letter (cf. Desbordes 1990: 181–182). In the same passage (22) Jerome repeats the traditional view on the letter ⟨k⟩ by stating that it is 'superfluous (*superfluum*) to mention the *k*, since even among Latins (*etiam apud Latinos*)—except for *Kalendae*—it is considered a superfluous letter (*superflua iudicetur*)' (cf. Desbordes 1990: 155–157, 176).

With regard to the Latin ⟨q⟩, a rather unexpected remark can be found at 29 in the same work, where Jerome skips this letter, explaining that he does so since 'neither the Greeks nor the Hebrews use it, and except for the Latins no other language has it (*exceptis Latinis nulla alia lingua habet*)'. This statement was integrated in a slightly modified version by Isidore, *Etym.* 1.4.13 (Fontaine 1959: 67). Instead of maintaining Varro's view of ⟨q⟩ as a 'superfluous' letter

(cf. above, p. 382; Desbordes 1990: 177–179), Jerome thus presents it as a letter which is exclusive to the Latin alphabet. He must think more specifically of the combination of ⟨q⟩ and ⟨u⟩, which in Latin represents the labialized velar /kw/. This would explain why he does not connect the Latin ⟨q⟩ to the Hebrew *qof* (ϙ) or, possibly, to the obsolete Greek *coppa*. It should be emphasized, however, that Jerome’s statement is not an isolated case. As Desbordes (1990: 159) points out, Latin grammarians were aware that the letter ⟨q⟩ in combination with ⟨u⟩ represented a phonetic unit which was foreign to Greek and ‘original’ to Latin. More specifically, Desbordes mentions the grammarian Scaurus (cf. above, p. 382), who in his *De orthographia* (KGL 7: 15–16) defends the usefulness of the sign ⟨q⟩ with reference to its particular value in combination with ⟨u⟩. Unlike Jerome, Scaurus does connect the Latin ⟨q⟩ to the Greek *coppa*, arguing that the Greeks abandoned this letter when they noticed that it was of no use within their own graphophonic system.

Jerome on Aspirates in Hebrew and Greek

Many of Jerome’s contrastive remarks relate to the use of aspirated consonants in Hebrew. The basis for most of Jerome’s observations appears to be that certain consonants which count as unaspirated ones within the Hebrew graphophonic system sounded aspirated to speakers of Greek (and Latin), and that certain consonants which count as aspirated in the Hebrew graphophonic system sounded ‘doubly aspirated’ to speakers of Greek (and Latin). In *Liber interpretationis Hebraicorum nominum* 11—between *Talam* and *Thobel*—Jerome notes: ‘until now we have read with a simple letter *t*, now we should read with an aspiration added (*aspiratione addita*)’. At 72—between *Tabernae* and *Theophile*—he notes that up to this point the names ‘were to be read with a simple letter *tau*’, but ‘now they are to be read with a Greek *theta*’. And at 61 (cf. 4 and 26)—between *Cananaeus* and *Chanani*—he states that

until now the names have been written with a simple letter *c* (*per simplicem c litteram*), which the Greeks express with a *k* (*quae Graeci per k efferunt*); from now on we will have to read them with an aspiration added (*aspiratione addita*), the letter which they [the Greeks] call *chi*.

More in general, Jerome notes in *Commentarii in epistulas Paulinas* Tit. 3.9 that in their Greek version, the translators of the Septuagint rendered (*expresserunt*) *heth* ⟨ח⟩, *ayin* ⟨ষ⟩, and other Hebrew letters of the same kind ‘by adding other letters’ (*aliis litteris additis*), because the Hebrew letters at issue could not be transferred as such, ‘with their double aspiration’ (*cum duplice aspiratione*), into Greek. For instance, he points out in *In Hieremiam prophetam libri sex*

4.11.2 that where Aquila, Symmachus and Theodotion simply maintained the Hebrew word *harsith*, the translators of the Septuagint ‘according to their habit for the aspiration of the letter *heth*’ added a *chi* in their Greek rendering, which in Latin gave *Charsith* for *Harsith*, *Chebron* for *Hebron*, and *Hiericho* for *Hierihos*. With regard to the same issue, Jerome points out in *Liber interpretationis Hebraicorum nominum* 4 that Ham ‘in Hebrew has no letter χ but is written with η which is uttered with a double aspiration (*quae duplice aspiratione profertur*)’. In *Commentarii in Danielem* 4.11.44/45 (CCSL 75A: 935) Jerome states that ‘the Hebrew language has no letter *p* but instead uses *phe*, the value of which is rendered by the Greek *phi* (*cuius uim Graecum φ sonat*)’. Barr (1967: 12) has argued that even the ‘hard’ realization of the Hebrew *pe*—later to be marked by a so-called *dagesh lene* (❷)—sounded too aspirated for a native of Latin to be rendered in the same way as a voiceless Latin /p/. Furthermore, Jerome argues in *Commentarii in Ezechiel* 8.25.15/17 that the Greek translations usually render the Hebrew *phe* with an unaspirated Greek *pi*, and that this explains why the ethnonym *Philistium* connects to contemporary *Palaestina* and why Greeks and Latins say *Pascha* instead of *Phascha*.³⁹

Ausonius

Ausonius often in a playful way integrates Latin and Greek letters and their graphical and phonetic peculiarities in his poems. In epigram 42, he inverts the meaning of the Greek names of two brothers named Χρῆστος and Ἀκίνδυνος by respectively adding and removing an *alpha*, so that Χρῆστος becomes ἄχρηστος, ‘useless’, and Ἀκίνδυνος becomes κίνδυνος, ‘danger’. A remarkable usage of the graphical aspects of the letters of the Greek alphabet can be found in another epigram (87), which is directed against a *grammaticus* whose fascination with the characters of the Greek alphabet is only challenged by his obsession with cunnilingus. For the graphical peculiarities of the Greek letters quoted in this epigram, one can refer to the detailed discussion by Adams (1983), who demonstrates that the Greek letters, when combined to each other, imitate the shape of the female *pudendum* (cf. Green 1991: 412). Adams’ tentative combination of the letters looks as follows (1983: 108):⁴⁰

39 This point is also discussed by Jerome in *Commentarii in Isaiam* 1.2.5/6 and *Liber interpretationis Hebraicorum nominum* 65, 69. Jerome’s discussions are integrated by Isidore, *Etym.* 9.2.58, and with idiosyncratic reference to the *p* of *Petrus* by pseudo-Hilary of Arles, *Tractatus in septem epistulas catholicas* 1 Petr.: *Petrus. (Quaeritur), si consuetudo est hoc nomen an ratio. Vtrumque illi conuenit. Consuetudo est, quia Hebrei pe non habent, sed phe. Ratio est, quia consuetudo aeclaeiae pro ratione reputatur.*

40 Image reproduced by kind permission of *Latomus*.

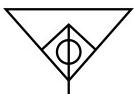


FIGURE 2

Ausonius also makes a number of actual contrastive observations in a long poem in *Technopaegnion* 14, entitled *De litteris monosyllabis Graecis ac Latinis*. This poem is a playful ‘treatment’ of the Greek and Latin characters the names of which are monosyllabic when pronounced separately. Ausonius points out a number of correspondences existing between the characters of the Latin and Greek alphabets respectively. The correspondences singled out relate to the rank or sequence of letters in the alphabet, to phonetic aspects or to graphical aspects. In addition, Ausonius also plays upon the mystical dimension of the letters of the alphabet (e.g. γ as the letter of Pythagoras; cf. p. 367), their numeral value (x in Latin), and characters or sounds present in Latin but absent from Greek (v, μ at the end of a word). Ausonius informs us that in Latin, the character /k/ is used in only three words. He does not specify the three words at issue, but on the basis of Pompeius’ *Commentum artis Donati* (*KGL* 5: 110), they might be identified as *kanna*, *karus*, and *kalamus*, or, alternatively, as *Karthago*, *Kalendae*, and *kaput* (or possibly as a combination of both series). Lastly, the phrase *coppa fui quondam Boeotia, nunc Latium* q suggests awareness of a genetic relationship between the Latin ⟨q⟩ and the obsolete Greek/Boeotian *coppa*, the former stemming from the latter.

Summary

Early Christian Latin authors show a remarkable fascination for writing systems and the elements they consist of; they wonder about their function, origins, and historical developments; they apparently feel that the alphabet is so intuitive a reality (possibly due to the early age at which it is generally learned) that it aptly structures literary works; and they engage in the description and comparison of writing systems. It was the overall purpose of this chapter to explore these various ways in which early Christian Latin authors conceive of writing and writing systems and put these observations to their own specific uses.

The first section was concerned with the authors’ opinions regarding the nature and function of the alphabet, the letters it consists of, and the practice of writing. Generally speaking, the authors seem to agree that the individual letters are the ‘atoms’ or ‘minimal parts’ both of written and of spoken language.

Letters are ‘generative’ in that they can be combined to each other in order to form first syllables, then words, and in last instance sentences or utterances. The ‘generative’ nature of letters provides the background for, or the full picture of the authors’ conception of ‘syntax’ as ‘joining words together’. As to the nature and function of the alphabet, a recurrent notion is that writing ‘represents’ or even ‘substitutes for’ speech and conversation, as well as for the ideas expressed in it. The ‘representative’ function of writing is elaborated upon by Augustine, who presents letters as ‘signs of words’. This notion is integrated by Isidore, who like Boethius also pays extensive attention to letters as the ‘atoms’ of language. In addition, Isidore goes beyond the other authors by considering letters as signposts in the reading process and by extensively dealing with the names, shapes, functions and sequential position of the letters of the alphabet, with due attention to the relation between nature and convention in these matters.

In accordance with a general tendency in ancient thought, early Christian Latin authors often trace the genealogy of a particular alphabet and pinpoint an ‘inventor’ for it. Related to this curiosity is the authors’ fascination for foreign, exotic writing systems, which evidently parallels their ‘lexicographical exotism’ discussed in Section 9.2 (p. 303f.). Apart from isolated but interesting remarks made most importantly by Pacian (the Muses as inventors of letters), Venantius Fortunatus (foreign alphabets), and Gregory of Tours (Chilperic’s orthographical innovations), extensive and consistent expositions have been identified only in the works of Jerome and Augustine (on the history of the Hebrew alphabet) and, most importantly, in Isidore’s *Etymologiae*. Isidore develops a general framework for the history of writing, presenting the Latin alphabet as deriving from the Greek, and the Greek as deriving from the Hebrew alphabet. For the origins of each of these three writing systems, he pinpoints dates as well as ‘inventors’ (Moses, Cadmus, Carmentis). He tends to maintain this approach when discussing the historical development of other writing systems (Hebrew, Syriac, Chaldean, Egyptian, Gothic). In addition, Isidore provides extensive discussions of the historical development of both the Greek and the Latin writing systems, distinguishing successive historical layers consisting of a definite number of letters and identifying authoritative, mythological or supposedly historical individuals responsible for innovations or new historical layers. Interestingly, these innovations or added layers often involve an explicitly supposed process of cultural ‘translation’.

In the third section I have turned to those authors who use the alphabet as an organizing principle for literary works. This practice concords with their ‘generative’ or ‘comprehensive’ notion of (the letters of) the alphabet, and it was inspired both by pagan and by biblical sources. Although this practice is

remarkably prominent among early Christian Latin authors, one should not forget that it is very widespread even today. The (partially) alphabetical organization of several psalms (most importantly 118) is a very popular theme, commented upon extensively by Hilary, Ambrose, Jerome, Augustine, and Cassiodorus. These exegetes connect the alphabetical organization of the psalms to the comprehensive nature of the alphabet in order to argue that these psalms, with the moral themes which they treat, comprise the whole of Christian moral doctrine. In addition, Ambrose and Jerome gloss the Hebrew letters with Latin phrases in order to add a spiritual or allegorical significance to the psalms. The alphabetically arranged psalms apparently provided an important exegetic *locus* on which Jerome tried to take over Ambrose's authority, and for which Cassiodorus relied intensely on the interpretations given by Hilary, Jerome and Augustine. The Hebrew psalms aside, attention has also been paid to Augustine's alphabetical psalm against the Donatists, to Venantius Fortunatus' *carmen figuratum* on the cross, and to Fulgentius' alphabetical and lipogrammatic *De aetatibus mundi et hominis*. Within this context, the authors frequently comment on the number of characters contained in the respective writing systems. Some of them even base their exegesis on the fact that Latin, with its 23 letters, is midway between Hebrew (22) and Greek (24).

The fourth and final section of this chapter dealt with the authors' specific comments on graphical aspects of, and contrastive statements with regard to writing systems. It comes as no surprise that the richest source for comments of this kind are the exegetic works of Jerome, who we have seen makes detailed and astute remarks on (1) the historical relation between the Syriac, 'Chaldean'/Aramaic, and Samaritan writing systems, (2) the general complexity of the Hebrew graphophonetic system, (3) the absence of and substitutes for vowels in the Hebrew graphic system, (4) the 'double letters' and misleading similarities in the Hebrew graphic system, (5) the Hebrew letters corresponding to Latin ⟨a⟩, ⟨g⟩, and ⟨s⟩, (6) letters that are 'exclusive', 'superfluous', or 'lacking' in Latin or in Hebrew, and lastly, (7) on aspirates in Hebrew and Greek and the relations between them. These observations are frequently made from a contrastive point of view, a fact that certainly relates to the context of Bible translation and biblical exegesis—Involving source and target languages—within which Jerome is active. An important fact is that only in a couple of cases, Jerome is actually bound to provide this detailed graphophonetic information in order to make his exegetical point. Rather, he uses his knowledge—or his ability to consult the Hexaplaric texts—to claim exegetic authority and to demonstrate his superiority with regard to earlier translators or exegetes.

Overview and Conclusion

The overall purpose of this study was to provide a history of linguistic ideas in early Latin Christianity—from Tertullian (b. c.160) until Isidore of Seville (d. 636)—covering the three thematic areas of (1) language history, (2) language diversity, and (3) language description. The investigation was carried out using an analytical grid which organized the different research questions and which provided the structure for this study. Since a summary of the answers to the guiding research questions has been given at the end of each chapter, a concise recapitulation of the study's global thread will be sufficient here. This synthetic overview will be followed by a number of general observations, and by some avenues for further research.

In the Introduction—after providing a state of the art and outlining the corpus of primary sources—I paid special attention to the relation between the ‘classical’ school tradition and the rise of Christianity in the Latin West. This also involved a survey of the linguistic situation in this area, of the authors’ individual linguistic competences, and of the extant intellectual networks. Part 1 of the study was then concerned with the thematic area of ‘language history’ or, in other words, with the authors’ retrospective accounts of how language and linguistic diversity developed. This part consisted of three chapters which followed logically upon each other—in accordance with the successive stages of language history as these were perceived by the authors. Chapter 1 was devoted to early Christian Latin authors’ ideas about the origin and nature of language. The central question in this chapter was how language arose (or ‘was given’) in the authors’ opinion, and how this relates to their ideas on the nature of language. The investigation of this topic revealed an important tension between ‘pagan’ and ‘Christian’ views. Chapter 2 focused on the authors’ ideas on the linguistic situation prevailing during the period between Creation and Babel, which I have called the ‘primeval situation’. The main theme in this chapter was the identity of, or the relation between, the single primeval language and post-Babelic Hebrew. Chapter 3 took us one step further in the development of language history, namely to the end of the monolingual ‘primeval situation’ and the origin of linguistic diversity, commonly identified with the events of Babel.

With the end of Part 1 we reached the point in language history where, from the authors’ point of view, language diversity is a reality: it is the result of the events of Babel, and as such it is liable to a negative evaluation within the Jewish-Christian worldview. In addition, it was the authors’ perception that communication and the propagation of faith are more complicated in a multi-

lingual situation than in a monolingual one. These are the underlying assumptions that constituted the point of departure for Part 2, which was concerned in general with evaluations of, and rhetorical 'uses' involving language diversity. In Chapter 4 I investigated how early Christian Latin authors use their preponderantly negative appraisal of language diversity, in function of their argument or as a rhetorical commonplace. One way to overcome the undesirable reality of language diversity is to learn foreign languages. Chapter 5 provided an investigation of the authors' views relating to foreign language learning. In accordance with the preponderantly negative appraisal of language diversity, an individual's multilingual competence is generally evaluated in a positive way—as a means by which to overcome language diversity. However, this chapter aimed to identify the specific contexts in which an individual's multilingual competence is indeed positively valued. From a Christian-biblical perspective, a different way to overcome language diversity is to acquire an 'unnatural' multilingual competence, a term which I have used in Chapter 6 to cover those cases where multilingual competence is not attained through the normal process of language study, the most prominent theme being the apostles' 'xenolalia' on the day of Pentecost.

Part 3 was devoted to the thematic area of 'linguistic description', i.e. to the ways in which the authors—expressing themselves in specific, 'linguistic' terms—comment on and exemplify the diversified linguistic reality of their days. Particular attention was paid to those cases where the authors contrast languages to each other. Within Part 3 the focus was gradually narrowed from the 'language level', over the 'sentence level' and the 'word level', to the 'letter level'. Linguistic description on the 'language level' was the subject matter of Chapter 7, dealing with the issue of how the authors try to make sense of the mutual positioning of languages. Chapter 8 dealt with language description on the 'sentence level', i.e. with observations on syntactic issues; the interest of early Christian Latin authors in matters of syntax appeared to be rather limited and to be tied in with some very specific issues. Chapter 9 dealt with language description on the 'word level'. For early Christian Latin authors—as for their 'pagan' predecessors—this was the most 'real' level of language description. Chapter 10 focused on the 'letter level', i.e. on the authors' discussions of writing, alphabets, and the letters these consist of.

The above recapitulation provides the background for a number of general observations that have emerged from this study. Probably the most important one is the following: although early Christian Latin authors show a clear interest in language-related realities, they are rarely concerned about language for its own sake. When the authors mention or describe a linguistic reality, they usually do so in function of a different argumentative purpose. The conse-

quence is that reflection on language in early Latin Christianity has a low level of 'disciplinarity' (or 'discipline-specificity'). Linguistic reflection in the period concerned can probably best be described as *ad hoc* discussion of text- and language-related issues, ancillary to theology and exegesis, and drawing on the philological methods of the Graeco-Roman tradition of grammatical and literary handbooks and commentaries. Admittedly, the low degree of 'disciplinarity' of linguistic reflection in early Latin Christianity should in part be explained by the fact that 'language manuals' themselves (grammatical, lexicographical, and orthographical works) were in principle excluded from the primary corpus for this study. However, these manuals belong to an older (non-Christian), normative tradition with very specific characteristics, regarding both content and form, and in late antiquity they are less distinctly 'coloured' by the Christian context. Furthermore, it should be emphasized that the authors did have the third theoretical option of devoting treatises to linguistic reflection in its own right, without embedding it in a theological-exegetical or didactic-normative discourse.

With regard to the authors' general conception of what a 'language' is, it seems justified to state that in their view, a language is not a coherent, 'structural' or '(dia)systemic' entity, but a collection of signs which primarily serve (1) to share mental contents (communication), and (2) to read and to understand texts (interpretation). The importance of this general view is closely related to the impact of Augustine's works. In the third part of this study it has become clear that the 'signs' of which a language consists are primarily to be understood as 'words'. This implies that, and explains why, (a) linguistic change is described in terms of 'changing words' (lexical change), (b) the level of syntax in linguistic description is largely neglected in comparison with lexicon and morphology, (c) language contact and affinity are often described in terms of lexico-semantic convergences, and (d) the 'word level' is predominant in linguistic description, due in part to the authors' fascination for obsolete and 'exotic' words. The hermeneutic relevance of words as signs can furthermore be connected with the fact that the authors (primarily Isidore, in this respect) believe that words indicate or reveal the essence of the things they denote—a view reaching back to Greek antiquity. This 'ontological' relevance of language motivates an interest in words and the questions of how and why they change, in order to be able to reconstruct their original and, thus, essentially most revealing form. This general view is enhanced by the theological context in which it is found: from a Christian point of view, all realities, including language, are bound to be in accordance with God's providential plan. This again legitimates the study of linguistic realities, as potentially revealing God's will.

As the examination of the language-related observations and claims has shown, language in early Latin Christianity owes much of its relevance to its role in biblical exegesis. The reason for this is that words (and, when words are taken together, language) serve as signs of God's will and of the content of faith. Although language is in itself considered a restricted and restrictive means of gaining understanding of God's will, in normal circumstances it is for most humans the only way to do so. This also explains why multilingual competence, most importantly of Hebrew, Greek and Latin, is positively valued in the context of Bible translation and exegesis. This ideal becomes very tangible in the person of Jerome, and it seems that Augustine might have judged multilingual competence 'superfluous' or 'vain' if it were not for its use in biblical exegesis. This exegetical context also explains why the reflections of early Christian Latin authors on language are to a large extent 'textual' or 'text-based'. The main *locus* for the authors' formulation of linguistic ideas are those works where they reflect on what is for them *the text*, i.e. the Bible. As has become clear in the course of this study, many of the authors' linguistically relevant comments relate to their desire to elucidate or to vindicate the biblical account, which is God's revealed word and therefore cannot contain mistakes. Furthermore, there is a close interaction between language-oriented reflections and attitudes towards different Bible versions, which are written in, or show the traces of different languages.

As I have emphasized elsewhere (Denecker 2014b: 151), this 'textuality', but also the (exegetical, theological, and ideological) 'contextuality' of the authors' linguistic reflections are aptly illustrated by the historical process of reception and interpretation of the Babel narrative. The story of the tower of Babel, which occupies a prominent place in collective memory, actually goes back to a brief and less than coherent narrative in the Hebrew Bible text. Over the centuries, this problematic biblical narrative has gone through a long series of receptions and interpretations. Since 'no exegete has ever existed in an historical and cultural vacuum' (Sherman 2013: 6), these interpretations are strongly biased by the various exegetical, theological, political, and sociocultural contexts in which they were produced. Some specific consequences of this reality are (a) that due to the ecclesiological context, linguistic diversity is just like any form of diversity considered inferior to the unity and universality of the Christian Church, and (b) that due to the 'ideological' background, some Christian authors (like Sulpicius Severus) are reluctant to identify the primeval language with post-Babelic Hebrew, because of the association the latter language shows with Judaism.

A different point of interest is the tension between the classical, pagan framework in which the authors were educated on the one hand, and the

Christian-biblical tradition to which they adhered on the other—the latter also involving an important ‘oriental’ component. Throughout this study, we have encountered cases where the authors engage in a debate with pagan writers or philosophers—e.g. Lactantius in his apologetic exposition concerning language origins—as well as cases of a productive interaction between both intellectual frameworks—e.g. when Jerome and Augustine deploy the conceptual and terminological apparatus of grammars and literary commentaries in order to contrast Hebrew, Greek and Latin to each other. Another attempt at the ‘integration’ of both frameworks can be found in Isidore, who elaborates a historical model for the development of writing systems which includes the pagan inventors of the Egyptian, Latin and Greek alphabets, next to Moses and Abraham as inventors of the Hebrew and Aramaic ones—thus smoothly juxtaposing elements from the Greek, oriental, Jewish and Christian traditions.

On the basis of the findings of (primarily) Part 1, it is possible to propose a general model for the transmission of linguistic ideas throughout early Latin Christianity. This model falls into four stages. In a first, pre-Augustinian stage, we observe a relative freedom in answering linguistic questions prompted by the biblical text. Within the thematic realm of language history, this involves a ‘floating’ and dynamic approach of the topic. This can be seen from the position which Filastrius refutes as being heretical (while acknowledging its exegetic potential), and from the peculiar though not inconsequential model put forward by Ambrosiaster. In a second stage, we observe a ‘canonization’ of linguistic thought, for the most part owing to the efforts of Jerome and Augustine, two of the four ‘Fathers’ of the Western Church. This process of canonization can be schematized as follows. Firstly, Jerome, who was more of a philologist or a ‘researcher’ than a creative thinker, provided the ‘raw material’ in the form of *ad hoc* remarks throughout his commentaries, drawing on Jewish sources and on his first-hand command of Hebrew, but also relying on Jewish ‘informants’. Subsequently, Augustine incorporated these raw materials when developing his model of language history, most importantly in book 16 of *De civitate Dei*. Undoubtedly, Augustine’s effort to provide a canonical model of language history was stimulated by the questionable status of competing views extant at the time when he wrote: Filastrius failed to propose a model sharply distinct from the heresies he refuted, while Ambrosiaster’s model suffered from the anonymity or pseudopigraphy under which his writings circulated. In a third stage, the model developed by Augustine was confirmed first by Augustine himself, in his *Retractationes*, and subsequently simplified and codified by such authors as his pupil and friend Quodvultdeus, Cassiodorus, Jordanes and, in poetry, by Claudio Marius Victorius. In a fourth and final stage, the Augus-

tinian model in its simplified and codified form was ultimately fixed by Isidore, most importantly in his *Etymologiae*, a work commonly accredited with a key role in the transmission of ancient learning (both ‘pagan’ and Christian) into the later Middle Ages.

This model for the transmission of linguistic ideas in early Latin Christianity can be extrapolated to several problems discussed in the two other parts. A few relevant cases can be mentioned here. The ideal of ‘trilingual biblical philology’ was introduced in Latin Christianity by Jerome, conceptually elaborated by Augustine, and codified by Cassiodorus and Isidore. The connection or opposition between Babel and Pentecost was introduced by Augustine, integrated by a number of ‘minor’ authors, and ‘condensed’ by Cassiodorus. On the level of language description, it has been observed that the raw data and partial descriptions of ‘Semitic’ languages were introduced by Jerome, integrated in theologically-oriented expositions by Augustine, and mined by ‘synthesizers’ such as, most importantly, Eucherius and Isidore. This model of transmission of ideas might also prove useful for historians of intellectual life in early Latin Christianity on a broader scale.

The model outlined above relates to another important outcome of this study, viz. the differentiated landscape and dynamic nature of language-oriented debates in early Latin Christianity. It has been pointed out in the Introduction that in literature on the history of linguistics, a tendency exists to quote Augustine as representative of early Latin Christianity in its entirety. While Augustine is indeed a key figure for the development of linguistic ideas in the period concerned, this study has also shown that the landscape of ‘players’ in the debates is considerably less monolithic than is commonly assumed. Various other, often less well-known authors have made important contributions to discussions on linguistic issues. In a number of cases, these authors enter in dialogue with each other, a fact which creates a dynamics often neglected in relevant scholarship. Apart from the ‘philologist’ Jerome, the ‘conceptual thinker’ Augustine, and ‘codifiers’ or ‘synthesizers’ such as Eucherius, Cassiodorus or Isidore, one can think of ‘creative’ but rather peripheral authors such as Filastrius, Ambrosiaster, Apponius and Arnobius the Younger, or of ‘helpers’ in translation activities such as Sophronius (Jerome), or Bellator, Mutianus, and Epiphanius (Cassiodorus). The individuals belonging to the latter group did not as a rule formulate linguistic ideas themselves, but Jerome and Cassiodorus expressed valuable appraisals of their multilingual competences. Harking back to the working distinction between ‘central’ and ‘peripheral’ authors presented in the Introduction, it can be concluded that in terms of innovation and impact, the only real ‘central’ authors (key figures) are Jerome and Augustine. As I hope to have shown, Jerome’s contribution to the study of language in the West—in

contrast to that of Augustine—deserves more attention than it has until now received in scholarly literature.

Some conclusions can also be drawn regarding the intellectual networks, of different status and type, and on different levels, which were presented in the Introduction. These intellectual networks are well traceable in the connections between Filastrius', Ambrosiaster's, Jerome's and Augustine's ideas on language history, discussed in Part 1. However, as has been emphasized in these chapters, the multiple 'loose ends' in the authors' expositions suggest a contemporary debate that was more complicated than can be reconstructed with certainty today. The intellectual networks are generally less tangible in the contexts described in other chapters, often due to the 'bookish' nature or the topicality of the issues discussed, which makes it more difficult to establish specific 'points of contact'. However, interesting cases are provided by the historical connection between Aelius Donatus and Jerome (Part 3), the quarrel between Jerome and Rufinus, and the epistolary exchange between Augustine and Jerome (Part 2). On a microlevel, I have singled out the Christian *feminae clarissimae* whom Jerome guided in their biblical exegesis and to whom he addressed exegetic letters containing comments on specific features of the Hebrew language. Other less tangible 'networks' can be discerned in the circulation of lexical information, as described in Chapter 9.

Even though they showed little interest in language for its own sake, early Christian Latin authors developed a significantly more intensive and systematic reflection on language-related issues than did their pagan predecessors (and contemporaries). As has repeatedly been affirmed throughout this study, this is undoubtedly due to the attention devoted to these issues in the Bible, and to a problematization of language diversity in connection with the propagation of faith. While it has become clear that linguistic reflection in early Latin Christianity is less 'monolithic' than is mostly assumed, it seems that it is nevertheless more 'harmonized' than linguistic reflection in early Greek Christianity, due to the undeniably predominant contribution of Augustine.

Although I have made an effort to discuss influences owing to, convergences with, and divergences from pagan authors and Greek Christian authors when this seemed relevant, a full and systematic comparison with these different intellectual 'spheres' is a project that exceeds the boundaries of this study. The same holds true for the reception of early Christian ideas on language in the later Middle Ages and the early modern period and, in a limited number of cases, up to the present day.¹ Avenues for further research can be indicated

¹ Contributions to a broader comparison are made by the respective chapters in Denecker

in the form of three suggestions. First, attention could be given to questions concerning the authority particular authors possess in later periods, but also to the possible recovery of 'deviant' views (such as Ambrosiaster's). Second, it would be interesting to focus on the role played by the changing linguistic situation in the 'Latin West' of the (early) Middle Ages. In specific terms: how did the decline of *Latinitas* and the emergence of the vernaculars affect views on language, linguistic affinities, and relations between languages? And third, it would be worthwhile to look at how in the periods following upon early Christianity, linguistic competence is evaluated in connection with biblical exegesis and theological discussions. Is it possible to discern a changing attitude—as is perhaps reflected by the adage *Graeca sunt, non leguntur*—, and if so, how do exponents of this new attitude position themselves towards the trilingual ideal of the 'Fathers'?

et al. (forthc.), which expand the thematic coverage both transversally (by investigating traditions in different languages) and longitudinally (by looking in more detail at the authors' intellectual legacy).

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Venantius Fortunatus	
– <i>Carmina</i>	Reydellet (1994, 1998, 2004) tr. Pucci (2010)
– <i>Vita sanctae Radegundis</i>	MGH SRM 2
– <i>Vita sancti Marcelli</i>	MGH AA 4/2
Vincentius of Lérins	
– <i>Commonitorium</i>	CCSL 64 tr. FOTC 7
– <i>Excerpta e sancto Augustino</i>	CCSL 64

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